'TWIXT HAMMER AND ANVIL.

A Novel.

BY

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'MISS DOROTHY'S CHARGE,' 'MR. VAUGHAN'S HEIR,'
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IN THREE VOLUMES.

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'TWIXT HAMMER AND ANVIL.

CHAPTER I.

A MARRIAGE CONTRACT.

During Mrs. Pemberton's absence the neighbourhood found a source of excitement in the De Chantal-Flandin matter, whose variable progress had from the first been viewed with that keen interest humanity is prone to accord to other people's affairs.

The terms of the contract were finally settled, and naturally everybody was familiar with the slightest detail of the business, which at one time became almost a metaphorical pugilistic contest between the respective parents of the young principals. Everybody knew that Madame de Chantal had been forced to yield to Monsieur Flandin's demands, and blamed her therefor, though her censors were well aware that she could not refuse, and that in a

similar case they would have acted as she had. Nothing now remained but for the proud old patrician dame to implore the Virgin, by prayers, penances, and a lavish expenditure of tapers, to use her influence so that only one heir might be born of the future union; for if the indiscretion of a second child were committed, the De Chantal name would have to endure the degradation of becoming only a prefix to the *roturier* appellation of Flandin.

The retired stockbroker had seized eagerly upon Effie de Marsan's suggestion, and carried his point; and what galled old Madame most was to know that the blow originated with Effie, and that the naughty creature exulted over her discomfiture. But she was obliged to hold her peace; she could not even relieve herself by confiding in Arthur: he would have denied Effie's action in the matter, and blamed his mother's injustice. He hurt her enough as it was by all manner of sneering remarks concerning the pass to which the De Chantals were brought, and satirical congratulations upon the means Madame had chosen to prop up the fallen fortunes of the ancient family. Worse than anything, he indemnified himself for his obedience as to the engagement by seeking consolation at Effie's hands more persistently

than ever, and Madame dared not so much as look an expostulation. It was a horrible state of affairs to the poor old lady, and even her joy at the success of her plan, which would bring wealth to Arthur, could not console her for these humiliations, which cut so deep that she aged visibly day by day.

The contract was to be signed immediately, though the wedding could not take place for several months. A relative of the Flandins had chosen this inopportune moment to die; she was Mathilde's godmother; and though her demise increased by many hundred thousands of francs the future bride's marriage portion, both Madame and the father felt that it had been sadly inconsiderate on the deceased lady's part not to defer her departure until after the wedding had taken place.

Arthur exasperated his mother in private by boldly rejoicing over the delay, and little Mathilde—given to romance in her small fashion—was not sorry to prolong this pleasant season. But the contract was to be signed at once; Madame and Monsieur Flandin held firmly to that; and Arthur was obliged to submit, though he told his mother he thought it disgraceful. Madame had to endure this also. She realized that the carrying out of her own

project had emancipated her son from her control. Henceforth her influence with him could only take the form of persuasion, and for the present—while his infatuation for Effie de Marsan continued—even persuasion availed little. Arthur was ceremoniously polite, but he systematically opposed whatever she wished done; and Madame blamed Effie for this, as well as for the other shadows that darkened her life at this juncture, the reaching of which she had thought a few months previous would bring such unalloyed rejoicing.

Monsieur Flandin might hesitate to run counter to etiquette by letting his daughter marry while in mourning, but he was not a man to allow so important an affair as the signing of the contract to be robbed of a jot of the imposing ceremonies which he deemed its due. He was realizing the aspiration of his life; his child was to enter one of the most illustrious families in France. More than that, if Providence showed proper benevolence in the sending of heirs, he should live to see his own name tacked on to that of the great family. It would be almost equal to owning the title himself. He appreciated Effie's suggestion at its full value, and, in his gratitude, set her up on a pedestal of

perfection nearly as lofty as that she occupied in young Arthur's mind.

There was only one drawback to Monsieur Flandin's enjoyment: Madame Pemberton would not be home in time for the great event. Her card of invitation had been forwarded to her. She had written a charming little note of regrets, and sent Mathilde a magnificent present, but she had no mind to hasten by a day her return to the place which had grown fairly hateful to her.

Invitations were sown broadcast, and the preparations were on as grand a scale as if a ball had been contemplated, though the Flandins were careful to say that they only bid their friends as witnesses; and it was a point of honour with the whole circle to speak of the coming festivity as if it were a mere legal ceremony, at which it was a solemn duty to assist.

The contract was to be signed at nine o'clock in the evening. Of course everybody was punctual. The whole neighbourhood would have been in arms against a wretch who ventured by any tardiness to show that he or she regarded the occasion in the light of an ordinary *soirée*, to which one might go early or late at pleasure.

The De Marsans were the last to enter. Effie had determined that such should be the case; and though Léon worried himself into a fever lest they should be behind time, she was deaf to his entreaties and Mayne's laughing expostulations.

The great *salon* was crowded when they appeared. Effie knew that her dress was perfection, and her looks at the best. She had made a profound study of her costume, and even consulted Léon's artistic taste as to her *coiffure*. She looked wonderfully elegant, fairly picturesque, and was satisfied with the sensation she created.

She saw old Madame de Chantal, looking terribly worn in her festal array, glowering at her. Monsieur Flandin hastened forward to receive her with an eagerness which delighted Effie, because she saw it made old Madame's brow grow darker. Then, too, Arthur was looking as poetically melancholy as a handsome young troubadour; and still more, little Mathilde, so rejoiced to see her, clinging to her as her dearest friend, was horribly dressed, and nervousness rendered her eyelids pinker than ever.

That dress was an additional sting to old Madame, but she had not been allowed to

interfere. In every way she was made to feel that her reign was over, and she of no more consequence than any other deposed sovereign in this ungrateful century. Mathilde was gentle and respectful always, but never failed to side with Arthur, and showed the mother, as plainly as her shyness would permit, that she thought her hard upon her son. So, in spite of Madame's efforts, Mathilde wore a heavy white *moiré*, that would have answered for a middle-aged dowager. Mauve trimmings decorated it, and the least tint of mauve in her costume took all the colour out of Mathilde's hair and eyes, and increased the pink of her eyelids.

Then, too, her hair was arranged in a fashion that had just come in, which chanced to be frightfully unbecoming to her; and, to complete her disfigurement, Monsieur Flandin had bought her a set of amethysts, superb in themselves, but which suited her no better than the mauve trimmings. And the stones were so huge, and the necklace so immense, and the bracelets so numerous, that the unfortunate little creature looked as if she had on fetters instead of ornaments.

The ceremonies took their course. To old Madame's intense disgust, Mathilde would

have Effie beside her while she signed. Arthur watched the wicked enchantress with his mournful eyes, and both the young people made her a prominent feature in the scene from first to last; and she added to the old woman's misery by honeyed congratulations which stung like nettles.

It proved quite a gay evening; true to their duty, the guests all declared afterward that it was unintentional and unavoidable. There was as much dancing as if it had been a ball —but it was *impromptu*,—no music but that of a pianoforte, played by a distinguished professor, who happened to be among the company; so there was no violation of decorum, and nothing whatever to offend the shade of the departed godmother if she chanced to come back for a peep at this weighty event.

Supper there was, and a magnificent one, but that came under the head of a necessity—if the ghost chose, she could consider it a sort of funeral baked meats served as an offering to her manes, in return for the liberal portion she had dropped into her god-daughter's lap before quitting this vale of tears.

Léon de Marsan was not in good spirits to-night; his wife's behaviour annoyed him

exceedingly; he understood perfectly every one of her manœuvres, and knew that she was doing her utmost to enrage old Madame and heighten Arthur's discontent. He hated it; he felt such conduct unworthy of her—positively wicked and degrading. He strolled out of the *salons*, and wandered away to a suite of rooms at the other side of the house. He had observed Effie dancing a few moments before — had seen Arthur waltzing with his betrothed, and stopped to wonder how any French girl could dance so ill.

Life was a very gloomy business to Léon de Marsan in these days. No form that success might take, whether praise or a golden fruition, could console him for the terrible solitude in which he groped.

Had Effie ever loved him? Often he asked himself this question, and of late it had grown full of wearing doubt. He could not help recalling the circumstances of their marriage. Effie had not been a young girl; she told him frankly that she had loved before—the man died. She had quarrelled with her step-grandmother, and was living in Italy with some distant relatives. The wife grew jealous of her; a certain amount of gossip had arisen; Léon's offer of marriage solved difficulties which

might otherwise have been very unpleasant to Effie.

Even now he hated himself for recollecting these things, but her behaviour forced their memory upon him. Had she ever loved him? If so, in her reckless yielding to the demon of coquetry which possessed her, she had literally worn out the faculty of finding content in the quiet happiness married affection could give. And day by day her demon gained fresh power. More than this, daily he was forced to see that, whether dictated by her craving for admiration or some tenderer feeling, her relations with Arthur de Chantal had passed a limit which she had never before exceeded in her most daring flirtations. But always, when he reached this certainty, he stopped short; his over-worked brain could not deal with the awful possibilities thus opened: he knew that if he hoped to preserve any power of self-control, nay, reason itself, this thought must be thrust aside.

Absorbed in his reflections, he passed through two or three rooms without noticing where he went, and reached the entrance to a small apartment which Monsieur Flandin used as a study. The door was ajar; he pushed it open; caught the sound of voices; looked in, and saw his

wife seated on a sofa, and Arthur de Chantal upon his knees before her, holding both her hands, and uttering words inaudible to De Marsan, though the passionate tone was warrant enough of what their import must be. Léon would not have heard if he could. His first impulse was to retreat unseen; then his temper surged up, and he could not resist the opportunity of punishing Effie as he had never before done.

"My dear Arthur, this is a poor time and place for private theatricals," he said, calmly.

The young man started to his feet. Effie did not stir. For once she was frightened, and even her tact failed in its usual readiness to show her a way out of the difficulty.

Léon was laughing. De Chantal stammered something: in his bewilderment he tried to laugh also.

"My dear fellow," cried Léon, gaily, "don't spoil your part, I beg! Your *rôle* is the young hero's. You must not laugh!"

Arthur glanced at Effie, back at the husband. To do him justice, he was thinking of her. The instincts of his blood and the education of a conventional gentleman prevented any feeling of cowardice, but the situation was too

awkward for him, in his youthful inexperience, to know how to meet it.

Léon sauntered slowly toward the pair, occupied in arranging a rose he wore in his button-hole. He stood in front of them, and said, still busy with the rose,—

"My boy, I am old enough to be your father, and I have always taken the liberty of scolding you. I must tell you, that now you have been guilty of a bit of bad taste! If you feel in a mood for going on your knees just this evening, you should have chosen your betrothed wife as the object of the performance."

A blow in the face would have been easier to bear than those words, uttered in a sort of compassionate tone, such as one might use to a child. Arthur would have known how to conduct himself had the blow been given; but though the pitying scorn of language and voice made his blood tingle with rage, he was at a loss what to do. Still, he thought of Effie and possible trouble to her! Almost without knowing what he said, he stammered,—

"If you require an explanation on Madame's account—"

"Good gracious!" interrupted Léon, "I was thinking of you, dear boy, and possible disagree-

ments if Mademoiselle Flandin had chanced to enter instead of myself! Madame is four-and-thirty, and has experience. I only felt it right to warn your youthfulness."

For the moment Effie positively hated her husband! In the icy wrath which seized her, she would have stopped at nothing to avenge this, to her, the cruellest thrust he could have dealt. Nobody dreamed that she was over twenty-six—the age with which she had burthened herself to Arthur while playing elder sister. She saw the boy give a start of pained astonishment—thirty-four for a woman seems old to a youth of two-and-twenty!

"No explanations of any sort are necessary, Arthur," she said, in a cold, disdainful voice. "Monsieur de Marsan knows that; but he is in the mood for a scene! I wish you would be good enough to go away, and let him have it with me alone."

Arthur stood irresolute; De Marsan showed no sign of having heard his wife's speech. When she finished, he again addressed the young man, in a voice which had lost its teazing sarcasm, and sounded quiet and calm, like that of a dispassionate observer, who had no concern in the affair beyond his interest for the youth.

"You are too young, Arthur, to think that

not only might you ruin your own future by small dramatics so inopportune as these, but you might be the means of hopelessly damaging the reputation of the lady who shares in them; you are too true a gentleman to wish to do that."

"Monsieur," cried Arthur, nearly out of his senses between varying emotions, "a purer, nobler lady does not live—"

"Naturally, dear fellow! I appreciate your verdict, but I know the fact so well that I do not require your opinion," interrupted Léon, with good-natured contempt.

"I am afraid the punch was made too strong, Monsieur de Marsan," sneered Effie.

"Ah, you think Arthur had taken a glass too much? Never mind! On a night like this it is excusable! He was a little nervous in his happiness! The signing of a marriage contract is as solemn a business almost as the marriage itself," returned Léon.

Effie clenched her fan so tightly between her hands that several of the ivory sticks snapped in two. She rose from her seat, and said,—

"Monsieur de Chantal, will you give me your arm back to the *salon?*"

"Certainly, Madame. But—but—I must speak—I must make Monsieur understand—"

He broke down, more enraged with himself for not knowing how to frame what he wanted to say, than he was with Léon's coolness.

"Monsieur understands perfectly," returned De Marsan. "My dear boy, I do not blame you in the least—except for thoughtlessness. All I say is, that you should not choose a place like this for doing amateur theatricals with a married lady."

"If you think—if—At least, I can fight you!" cried Arthur, completely beside himself.

"Bah!" laughed Léon. "If I were offended I should be more likely to box your ears, as I used sometimes to do when you were a smaller boy than now—though less foolish."

"Monsieur!"

"Don't be melo-dramatic, Arthur!" said Léon, in his laziest voice.

"You—you—I cannot be treated like this!" cried the unfortunate young fellow.

"Will you take me back to the *salon*, and leave that madman to himself, Arthur?" asked Effie.

"In a moment, Madame. But I must tell Monsieur that I alone am to blame. Sir, I am unhappy. I respect your wife; I talk freely to her. I ought not to have gone on my knees; I was speaking of myself and my future alone."

"My dear boy, I never dreamed of accusing you of wrong-doing," replied Léon. "See here! I am an older friend than Madame; I cannot console you in your fancied miseries as prettily as she would, but I mean to give you a word of advice. Behave sensibly; occupy yourself with your *fiancée;* leave married flirts to older heads than yours. Now take Madame back to the *salon*, as she wishes, and think no more of this—very—poetical—amusing—little scene—except to let the recollection render you wiser for the future. Try also to comprehend that when you are married, though you may be perfectly willing your wife should have male friends, you will prefer they should receive her consolation and advice in a less dramatic attitude—on account of other people's opinions, you know."

He walked quietly away. Arthur offered Madame de Marsan his arm, and they followed—Effie beginning to talk upon ordinary topics with perfect ease, though her companion was not able to emulate her composure. But Léon proved quite her equal in self-possession. As he reached the doors leading into the entrance-hall, he saw a group of people standing there; he waited for his wife and Arthur to come up, that they might all three return

together, and he was laughing and jesting in high spirits, which did not again flag while the festivity lasted.

It was late before people began to leave. Aurora Somers was among the guests, and the evening had not been a pleasant one to her. She never went out except with Honour, but on this occasion she put by her shyness. She had encountered Monsieur de Vieuxville a day or two previous, as she was leaving the Galais' house, and told him her troubles, fairly asking him to escort her to the party and see her safe into the *salon*. Of course he consented, and proved very kind and attentive, but from the first Aurora's career was a series of misadventures. She tore her gown before leaving the dressing-room, and had to get Mademoiselle Mathilde's maid to sew up the rent in the gathers. Then, in entering the drawing-rooms, though she had the support of Monsieur de Vieuxville's arm, she managed to stumble over the threshold, and would have fallen had he not held her up.

Everybody was exceedingly cordial, for her relationship to Madame Pemberton rendered her a personage—the neighbourhood was divided into persons and personages. But Aurora could not recover her serenity; it was

so many years since she had been in society without the protection of Honour's presence, that her poor head went utterly astray. She tried to express her trouble to De Vieuxville. "I feel," she said, "as if I had lost part of myself, and am all the while wondering whether it is my back hair or the tail of my gown."

Kindly disposed as he might be, of course he could not devote his whole evening to her, and Aurora was led by some mischievous imp from one misfortune to another. She broke a priceless little china image on a table in the anteroom, hid the pieces in her pocket with the intention of having Honour find its mate; cut her fingers through her gloves, and was in agony lest the loss of the treasure should be discovered, the fragments found in her pocket, and she accused of theft, and Honour not there to explain matters. At supper she ruined the front of her lavender satin gown with a coffee-ice. This accident put the finishing-touch to her troubles, and she flew back to the empty *salons* in utter despair. Suddenly she conceived the idea that Monsieur de Vieuxville must have deserted her and gone home. She rushed upstairs to the dressing-room, found a wrap which she believed hers

(it proved later to be a scarlet mantle belonging to Effie de Marsan), and fled in search of a conveyance to carry her home, so far beyond the widest limit of sanity, that she could not have told whether she had come in a coach or a barrow.

The servants were busy in the supper-room; nobody in the entrance-hall except the sleepy old porter. Mademoiselle de Hauteville's antiquated equipage was in waiting, that relic of former days having ordered her chariot to be ready at an early hour.

The porter put Mrs. Somers into the vehicle, glad to rid himself of her on any terms (she pinched him black and blue during their brief colloquy, and his wife never would believe his explanation in regard to the marks left by Aurora's fingers). He woke the coachman from a dream caused by imbibing too much cider, in which he fancied himself a mouse-trap occupied catching Monsieur Flandin's guests, while that irate gentleman stood over him in a speckled nightcap; and the poor coachman could not explain, for each time he opened his mouth it shut with a snap and engulfed a fresh victim, and he conscious that the receptacle was full, and his prisoners trying to eat their way out from their place of

confinement. So, when the porter woke him, away he dashed, as fast as the fat horses could go, and never drew rein till he reached the Hauteville mansion, good three miles off, and in the opposite direction from the De Vieuxville château.

A servant came out to open the door. Aurora had been asleep—was still dozing; she woke to find herself in a strange entrance-hall, two unknown faces looking at her in wonder, and she began to dance up and down, and scream like a maniac,—

"Honour, Honour! murder! fire! Honour!"

She drove the two old servants as wild as herself; and, between them, they made such a din that it roused Monsieur de Hauteville, asleep in the library. He had been too unwell to accompany his sister. Out he came, recognized Mrs. Somers, and tried to learn what she was doing there. By this time Aurora was too insane to recognize him or anybody else; she conceived the idea that the Flandins, discovering the loss of the image, had inveigled her away to a court of justice, and that Monsieur de Hauteville was the judge, ready to sentence her to imprisonment for life. Down she fell on her knees, shrieking,—

"I did not steal it! Honour knows I never

did! It came in two, and I kept the pieces to match. Honour!—where is Honour? Oh, good Mr. What-you-call-him, be merciful, be merciful!"

It took full ten minutes to rid her of the idea that he was the judge. When he succeeded, matters were not bettered. She still thought herself in prison, but she recognized Monsieur de Hauteville—dashed at him, flung her arms about his neck, and pleaded frantically, in every language she could muster, that he would save her from the terrible fate which had overtaken her.

The whole house was roused. One maid-servant woke, under the impression that the château was in flames, and began flinging every breakable article down the grand staircase, in order to save it from the fire. A male domestic jumped out of his bed, believing that burglars had broken into the mansion, and charged the group in the entrance-hall with an old blunderbuss, which, fortunately, would not go off.

Everybody was shrieking at once, Aurora still clinging to Monsieur de Hauteville. She had knocked off his wig, and was pleading with him to save her; and he, exasperated to madness, shouted to the frightened domestics to take her away,—to drown her, kill her, do any-

thing to save him from that strangling embrace!

And into the midst of the tumult entered Mademoiselle de Hauteville, in a towering passion. She had found her carriage gone; had returned to the *salons*, and fallen foul of Monsieur Flandin before all his guests; and when the old woman's temper was up, no crusader among her ancestors could have been more terse and plain in language than Mademoiselle.

An explanation with the porter, and Aurora's disappearance, convinced De Vieuxville what had happened. He persuaded Mademoiselle to get into the Pemberton carriage, and off they drove; but Mademoiselle would not listen to excuses. She was in a rage, and must vent it upon somebody; so, without rhyme or reason, she flew at the Marquis, told scores of unpleasant truths in regard to his father, and, with the exception of his mother, did not leave male or female of his line a rag of reputation to cover their memories, winding up with a declaration that, as for his maternal parent, he had murdered her, and she, Desirée de Hauteville, knew it, and would hold her peace no longer—*gare à lui*—war, she would have war! And he, familiar from childhood with her ways, never so much as answered.

They reached the house; she was out of the carriage before he could stir, and banged the door behind her with such force that she broke the handle, and it took him a good five minutes to open it. In the mean time Mademoiselle had gained the hall, and flung herself into the *mêlée* with Amazonian fury.

Naturally she flew at her brother first, calling,—

"Who is this you are hugging in the faces of the servants?—you indecent old wretch, you!"

And he, more frightened than ever, could only moan,—

"Take her off! My good sister, for God's sake take her off! I suffocate—I die!"

And Aurora just heard enough to make her suppose the moment had come when she was to be carried away into solitary confinement for the rest of her life; she clung more closely to her victim, danced him up and down, shrieking,—

"I never stole it—I never stole it! Ask Honour—Honour knows! Oh, good people, have mercy. Save me, save me!"

"If it is not that crazy old Somers woman!" shouted Mademoiselle. "Let him

go, I say! Aren't you ashamed of yourself, at your age?"

And the servants yelled and dashed against each other, and Mademoiselle stumbled over her brother's wig, and beat him with it; and in came De Vieuxville, having at last managed to extricate himself from the carriage by the coachman's assistance.

For the life of him he could not repress a burst of laughter. Suddenly, Mademoiselle began to laugh too, got her senses back, sat down in a chair, fanned herself with her brother's wig, and shouted to the servants,—

"Leave the hall, every man Jack and Jill, or I'll turn the whole set of you out of doors to-morrow morning."

They were all afraid of that voice when it rang forth so like a battle-trumpet, and fled incontinently.

De Vieuxville devoted himself to bringing Aurora to reason and freeing Monsieur de Hauteville from her embrace, while Mademoiselle sat quietly fanning herself with the wig, occasionally addressing its owner.

"Do you like it? You have always had a weakness for embracing! I know your tricks! Do you like it? Will it be a lesson to you?"

"Oh, my good sister—oh, my dear Monsieur—take her off, take her off!" the little man gasped, each time his sister paused in her cruel chant of victory. When he paused from lack of breath, she would recommence, fanning herself the while,—

"Do you like it?—do you like it? You have thought me blind all these years. Ah, ha! You enjoy embracing; now you have it with a vengeance. Ah, ha!"

At last De Vieuxville released his poor old friend. Aurora indulged in a mild attack of hysterics. When she recovered, and was sufficiently sane to comprehend matters, old Mademoiselle condescended to quiet her, adjusted her brother's wig on his head, sent for wine and water, and beamed as grandly affable as if nothing unusual had happened, and Mrs. Somers and De Vieuxville had dropped in for a friendly visit at a reasonable time and season.

CHAPTER II.

THE GATHERING CLOUD.

A FEW days later Honour returned from her wanderings. She had sent a despatch to Aurora before leaving Paris, so the carriage was waiting for her at the station.

She found no pleasure in coming back. Her spirits, which had improved of late, began to flag as soon as she got out of the train, and sank lower and lower with every turn of the familiar road. She remembered her first arrival on that gloomy spring night, and the more gloomy presentiments which haunted her. Verily they had not failed in their fulfilment.

She was in sight of the sugar factory. She had bidden the coachman drive fast, hoping to pass unnoticed. But the news of her coming had spread. The men had set scouts to watch for her arrival. Out of the pulping-rooms and press-houses poured every creature who could leave his employment.

Honour was obliged to stop, receive the greetings of the overseers, and speak kindly to the labourers.

The landau was stationed just beyond the counting-house. Monsieur de Vieuxville chanced to be standing at a side door as the rush of workpeople swept down the slope to greet their employer; so, however little he might feel inclined, there was no escape from taking his part in the welcome. He walked slowly up to the carriage, spoke a few courteous words, which were answered with equal courtesy. But Honour did not offer to shake hands, nor did he make any movement toward such act of friendliness.

She asked a few general questions,—they might have been addressed either to the overseers or the manager,—inquired after the health of the people, observed that she was tired, and drove on amid the shouts of the men. But, brief as the pause had been, fully occupied as she seemed, Honour's quick eyes caught a glimpse of Gracieuse Galais at one of the counting-house windows; and though she scarcely glanced toward Monsieur de Vieuxville, noticed how pale and worn he looked; found leisure, also, to feel vexed with herself for observing his appearance in any way.

A little further on were stationed the school-children and teachers, the sisters, the people from the hospital; and Honour had to stop again, and reproach herself as hard and ungrateful, because all these affectionate greetings only wearied her; while Céline, on the opposite seat, beamed with delight at these signs of her beloved mistress's popularity.

Monsieur Galais had been roused by the tumult, and came out of his house to have a share in the welcomes. But, fond as she was of the old man, even this meeting had its cloud, for she could not help observing that he seemed more feeble and ailing than when she last saw him.

Still another delay on reaching the hamlet where the workmen lived. The women and children were waiting for her, and Honour was nearly deafened by the chorus of shrill, childish voices. It ought all to have been so pleasant, so gratifying, and it was just a weariness and disappointment. From here she could see the towers of the old château. They looked to Honour's eyes as dark and dismal as the castle of the Giant Despair. She was absurd and fanciful, nay, positively wicked. These welcomes ought to be sweet to her ears; this return to the scene of the duties

she had undertaken, to fill her with gratitude that she had been permitted to be of service in her day and generation. But gratitude, like love, is hard to find at will. She reproached herself bitterly enough, but her inward condemnation had no effect upon her feelings.

It was all she could do to keep from ordering Céline to hold her tongue when she burst into ejaculations of delight over this warm reception of her lady. She told herself that she certainly was the hardest, most disagreeable woman in the world. No marvel that happiness, such as came to other human beings, did not fall to her lot. She was undeserving of it, since she could not even appreciate the blessing she had once thought would be the dearest she could have, that of knowing she was of use.

Aurora grew quite tearful in her joy at getting her relative back; the servants were in a state of tumultuous delight, and Honour felt more and more how hard and disagreeable she was, and wondered that anybody should take the trouble to like her.

The next day she received numerous visits; but her mood had improved so little, that she wished she had remained away. At least then she should not have been obliged to feel such a

monstrosity from her inability to care for these demonstrations of interest and friendship.

She had questioned herself very sternly during the past night. She had tried to be truthful, but she knew she had told her conscience many lies. She did her best to believe that this wretched state of mind arose from the business anxieties she had gone through—that this misanthropy, so much worse than the vague sense of loneliness which used to haunt her, was a selfish weakness wherein her heart had no share. But her efforts were not successful. The best she could do was to get away from herself and try not to think.

The De Marsans came, the Flandins, and Effie was more than ever convinced that the stout, elderly gentleman had dreams of consoling himself for the approaching loss of his daughter; but she determined to give no hint to Honour, lest that inexorable creature should spoil the sport by snubbing the gallant stockbroker before he arrived at the climax. Old Madame de Chantal called, and Arthur with her, looking very handsome and melancholy. It meant nothing, Mayne whispered to Honour; he adopted that expression because it brought out his beauty in the fullest relief.

Mayne was as gay and agreeable as ever—very attentive too. People went away remembering that several times before they had thought he was "making up" to the widow; and the fact that Monsieur de Vieuxville did not appear roused in their minds a suspicion that they might have been too hasty in their decision that he stood the best chance among the lady's numerous admirers.

Later in the day Mademoiselle de Hauteville drove over in her ancient chariot, built, Mayne always averred, on the model of Pharaoh's, if not the very machine which was lost when he tried to pursue the children of Israel through the Red Sea.

Honour was alone when Mademoiselle entered, grim and gaunt as ever, but at heart more rejoiced to see her favourite than she had any ability to express. Aurora's absence enabled the old maid to speak of the misadventure which had occurred the night of the contract-signing at the Château de Rollebois. Honour had received a confused account, of which she could make nothing, from Aurora herself; but the spinster really told the story very well, and did not spare herself in the description.

There I sat fluttering poor old Hilaire's wig,

under the impression that it was my fan—as like a crusader, crossed legs and all, as a petticoated creature could look," said she, "and poor Hilaire a spectacle of misery, and De Vieuxville supporting dear little crazy Madame! My child, you have seen nothing on the stage to equal it, and I was the most ridiculous object in the tableau!"

Honour laughed more heartily than she had thought she ever could again, but very soon Mademoiselle brought her back to gravity.

"Speaking of De Vieuxville," said she; "of course you have seen him?"

Honour replied that she had.

"I do not know what ails him—he looks very ill," continued the old maid. "I went to see him yesterday, and gave him a good lecture! 'If you are out of health,' said I, 'go to bed, and I'll come and nurse you! If you are in trouble, out with it, and if it is in woman's power, I'll help you.'" She paused, looked keenly at Honour, and added, "Have you any idea what is the matter?"

"Oh, no," Honour answered, indifferently; "you forget that I have been absent for nearly a fortnight."

"Humph!" said the spinster, and looked grimmer than ever.

Honour began speaking of other matters—of Monsieur de Hauteville's lumbago—the weather—anything which might change the conversation.

Mademoiselle submitted, and took her part in the new topics without a struggle. Naturally the subject of the betrothal came up. Mademoiselle had strong opinions in regard to the humiliations which Madame de Chantal had been forced to endure from the demands of Monsieur Flandin, and did not hesitate to express them.

"But I am thankful the business is settled," she continued; "at one time I thought it never would be, and your little silky pussy-cat of a friend—Madame de Marsan—would have been the cause. My dear, I think I should have throttled her with these two hands;" and Mademoiselle stretched out ten gloveless fingers, which looked wiry and strong enough to have done the work effectually, had she found it necessary.

"I am positive that you are mistaken," Honour replied; "Effie de Marsan would not be capable of such conduct."

"Bah!" pronounced Mademoiselle. "She blinds you just as she does the men. What I wonder at is her husband's apparent uncon

sciousness: do what she will, he pays no attention."

"You must not talk against Madame to me," Honour said; "I like you, but I am very fond of her."

"Good!" quoth Mademoiselle, not in the least offended. "Take your own way; nobody can cure a cataract unless the patient will submit to an operation."

"You are very unjust to her, and you ought not to let your prejudices influence your judgment."

"I am a bundle of prejudices," interrupted Mademoiselle, "and I know it, and I am afraid I glory in it, though I never go to confession without getting a penance for that special sin."

It was impossible to avoid laughing at her whimsical manner, and the half-rueful, half-triumphant expression on her stern face—a face that Léon de Marsan said would never be seen to proper advantage until she adopted one of her ancestors' casques as a head-dress. He once made a sketch of her in that guise, and Mademoiselle was more amused than anybody with the joke, and vowed if ever she had her portrait painted, to hang up in the family picture gallery, it should be taken in that way.

"A bundle of prejudices I am," pursued Mademoiselle: "and I happen to have one in your favour."

"I am glad of it, and I return it warmly," replied Honour, smiling; "all the same, I shall not let you abuse my friends."

"Oh, you need not hope to try any 'love me, love my dog' business where I am concerned," cried Mademoiselle. "But never mind your pussy-cat; I have something of more importance in my head, and I mean to tell you before anybody else gets a chance, because I do not want you to follow my example of taking evil prejudices."

"You claim a monopoly," returned Honour. "Well, tell me what it is. I promise to be more obliging than you; I will see with your eyes, if I can."

Mademoiselle puckered her heavy brows into a frown, and looked preternaturally cross; however Honour knew her well enough to perceive that she was not in a bad humour, but really troubled.

"There's your little girl at the sugar factory," said she, abruptly; "I dare say she thinks I am an old Gorgon, too proud of my grand name to think about her —but I do—and she is a sweet little thing,

and her father fit to have been born a prince."

"What about her?" Honour asked, quickly. "I have not seen her yet."

"Then you had better, and be good to her," cut in the old maid. "If this goes on, she will need a friend; and if you are the woman I take you for, you will stand by her."

"Do tell me at once what you mean!" cried Honour, with a sudden sinking at her heart.

"I thought I had—just my clumsy way of doing things!" grumbled the spinster. "My dear, there is gossip about her; how or where it began Satan only knows; but if it spreads it will ruin her and kill her father."

"Gossip?" Honour repeated, faintly.

"Yes; it came to me through my waiting-maid; we are two old women together, and of course we talk! It is all as vague as possible; but if the servants have begun, it will get among their masters. My dear, it is an infernal shame!—that is not lady-like, but I don't care—it is, and an accursed falsehood into the bargain!—*voilà!*"

She had begun quietly; she was in a towering rage before she ended, and struck her clenched hand upon the table till everything there trembled and shook; her keen eyes

flashing, and her old voice booming out like a bass-drum.

"Whatever it may be, I will do anything in my power—"

"And you will not believe it?" broke in Mademoiselle. "Promise me you will not."

Honour was only too certain that rumour had been connecting Gracieuse's name with De Vieuxville. Knowing what she did, it was difficult to answer satisfactorily the demand which Mademoiselle repeated still more fiercely,—

"You will not believe it?"

"I will try to think kindly; it would require a great deal to make me believe evil of Gracieuse Galais."

"Good!" pronounced Mademoiselle, but she did not look altogether content. "As for him—it is impossible! I have known him all his life! I held him in my arms when he was a baby! I tell you it is as black a falsehood as ever was uttered."

Honour remained silent. Mademoiselle had mentioned no name; she was not bound to ask questions.

"Armand de Vieuxville is the noblest man that ever lived," cried Mademoiselle; then, becoming conscious that she was absolutely

shaking her fist within an inch of Honour's nose, paused to apologize, and went on more rationally. "My dear, say you know he is incapable of harming a living creature; say that you no more believe evil of him than you do of her."

Honour was not a woman to let herself be pushed to the wall. She had no intention of telling her real opinion of the man to any human being; but neither to gratify his advocate nor humour a certain cowardice she felt, lest she should not be able to speak dispassionately, and thereby show personal feeling, would she reply in the affirmative.

"I do not know Monsieur de Vieuxville well enough to give any promises where he is concerned," she said. "I am not prepared to say that I should be a lenient judge of his conduct, if through him slander in any way attacks a friendless girl."

"But, *bon Dieu!* when I tell you he is incapable of it!" shouted Mademoiselle, springing up from her seat in her excitement.

"I can only say that I will try to believe it until I am forced to doubt," replied Honour.

The old woman sank back in her chair; all the wrinkles in her face seemed to gather in knots; her voice quivered, as she said,—

"Somebody has been beforehand with me! What have you heard? Who told you?"

"No human being has ever breathed a whisper of such gossip to me," said Honour; "I never even heard their names connected."

"Ah," sighed Mademoiselle, shaking her head, "then a suspicion I got the day we were at the pavilion is true—you do not like my poor Armand; you are ready to believe ill of him?"

"If I know myself, I am never ready to believe evil of anybody," returned Honour, firmly.

"No, no, my dear; I am sure you are not! I am a rude old woman; I beg your pardon," cried Mademoiselle. "I had no right to ask your opinion; only I am disappointed. I had hoped you would like him. I suppose that is impertinent too; but I can't help it—I had hoped! And you do not? Well, well; that is not your fault either! I am a stupid old maid, and you have a right to be vexed with me."

Few people would have believed that the cast-iron creature could be so moved, or that the tortures of the Inquisition could have wrung an apology from her obstinate lips.

"Indeed, indeed, I am not vexed! Why should I be?" cried Honour. "But it is the

poor girl we have to think of, not the man! Scandal of that sort does not hurt a man," she added, bitterly.

"No, and more shame to us women that it does not," said Mademoiselle; "it is our fault that it is so! Let a man be known to have broken up two or three families, ruined a few fools of girls, and all the women are crazy over him. Well, well; I need not waste my time raging against society! The question is, what are we to do?"

"What can we do? I do not even know what is said."

"It is easy enough to guess! It is all vague yet; but you know how such things grow."

"Yes; still, when there is no foundation, I think evil reports soon die away. Let us hope they will in this case; that Gracieuse and her father may never hear of them."

"God grant it! She must like you—you must have influence—you could warn her to be careful—to—"

"Excuse me, does not such a suggestion imply on your part a fear that warning may be necessary?" Honour asked. It was a rather cruel question; but she was thinking of De Vieuxville, not the girl, and was unable to repress it.

"No!" thundered Mademoiselle. "I would stake my soul on Armand's honour! But I'll tell you what would happen! If the girl were really to be injured by bad reports, he would marry her, he is so chivalrous, so Quixotic—"

"I should say the only honourable course he could take," added Honour, coldly.

Mademoiselle rubbed her nose, and descended rather hastily from her high horse.

"In theory, but not easy to reduce to practice," she said, as if a little ashamed of the admission. "No, no; we cannot go so far as that! I went yesterday to tell him outright, but I had not the courage. I knew it would hurt him so terribly."

"Yet that seems the one thing you could do."

"Well, we will see. It may blow over, as you say. I told you, because I wanted you to be prepared if the rumours reached you. I did not wish you to be prejudiced against him."

"But, as I said, to my mind it is only Gracieuse who is to be thought of."

"Yes—I suppose so—that is right," replied Mademoiselle, hesitatingly. "My dear, I am as sorry for her as possible; but—well, you see I have loved Armand ever since he was born.

It pains me dreadfully to think that you can admit any stories would prejudice you against him."

"Unfounded gossip will not," said Honour.

"But, my dear, after all, you cannot believe bad of him without believing the same of her; and you don't want to do that!" cried the old maid, somewhat triumphantly, feeling she had hit upon a theory which would place her listener in a quandary; but Honour disposed of the difficulty with great ease.

"Yes, I could," she said. "Suppose anything—the very worst. I could pity her—help her: I would cut my right hand off sooner than let it touch his."

Mademoiselle gave her a quick, searching glance, then looked away. The very energy with which Honour had spoken roused a faint hope in her mind that she might not be so indifferent to Armand as she wished to believe. But Mademoiselle was careful to make no sign.

Presently she took her leave. One good effect had been produced by the interview. Mademoiselle's liking for Honour was greatly increased, and Honour felt a sincere respect for the stern old spinster, who had shown that, beneath her grim exterior, her faults of pride

and temper, she possessed a warm, kind heart.

The next day Honour went to see Monsieur Galais. He was overjoyed at her coming, and in such good spirits that it was plain no breath of rumour or suspicion had troubled him. He sent for Gracieuse, but it appeared she was not in the house.

"I did not know she had gone out," Monsieur said; "I am sure she was here only a few moments before you drove up."

Honour felt certain that the girl had seen her approach, and got out of the way.

"You must both come to see me," she said; "I cannot go to the counting-house to-day, for I must visit the schools."

"I dare say Gracieuse is there," he replied; "she busies herself a good deal with the children. You know she has much less to do now at the counting-house."

"And it is easier, fitter work," Honour said. "Persuade her to leave those tiresome ledgers to the clerks—there are enough of them—and choose some pleasanter occupation."

Monsieur Galais had just received a letter from Dr. Jean, which had given him great encouragement. He was full of hope that Chegary's devotion would meet with its

reward. He talked freely to Honour; and her heart sank lower and lower when he told her that Gracieuse was silent and pre-occupied, and he ascribed the change in her manner to the fact that she missed her cousin, and was beginning to discover that he had grown more to her than she had supposed.

It became too painful to sit and listen to the good old man's cheerful anticipations, while every word only increased her gloomy forebodings. She rose rather abruptly, saying that if she did not hasten she should be too late to visit the schools. He asked permission to accompany her; and the children were as pleased, if not so much flattered, to see him as Honour, for he was a great favourite among them. But neither there nor in the hospital, where a couple of sick men were being tended by the sisters, did they find Gracieuse, and Monsieur regretted the mischance exceedingly —she would be so disappointed to have missed her dear Madame!

Honour drove on to the De Marsans' house. Effie had heard of the reports spread in regard to Gracieuse, but so vaguely that she hardly knew what was said. She was genuinely sorry, and as she hated Madame de Chantal, felt perfectly certain the stories must have originated

with her, though she admitted it seemed scarcely probable.

"She could have no motive," Honour said.

"Only diabolical malice—the basis of her character," cried Effie, more venomously than she often spoke.

De Marsan heard, and laughed in a fashion which irritated his wife, but Honour was too busy to notice that the pair were constantly stinging each other in every possible covert way.

Léon had done very little on his large picture: he was busy executing some small commission.

"I was glad it came," Effie said, in her sweetest voice. "Léon is not in a mood for doing his best—he is tired—and luckily this order took him away from the important work."

A bit of wifely solicitude, about as aggravating as any taunt she could have uttered. Honour did perceive that he looked wretchedly ill, and alluded to it; but she saw her remarks annoyed him, so she got away as fast as possible from the subject.

"I think it must be something in the air," she said; "I find almost everybody looking pale and tired." Straightway before her

mental vision rose De Vieuxville's image, as she had seen him look on the day of her arrival. She was so vexed with herself for thinking of him, that she hastened to give utterance to a determination born in her mind on the instant. "I shall go away very soon—to Trouville or some watering-place," she added.

"I should like that," said Effie. "Suppose we go too, Léon."

"I must work," he replied, shortly.

"The Flandins are going to Trouville," pursued Effie, after she had taken time to heave a sigh for Honour's benefit. "Everybody says it will be very gay there—I quite envy you, Honour."

"What hinders your going with her if you like?" asked her husband. Effie seized upon this.

"It is settled!" she cried, gaily. "Honour, I go with you! Do persuade this cross old boy to join us later, if he will not take us there."

When Honour reached home she found Monsieur Pellerin in amiable conversation with Aurora, having easily discovered that lady's weakness—a fondness for hearing Honour praised. She told her cousin afterward, that next to De Vieuxville she considered Monsieur

Pellerin the most perfect gentleman in Normandy; and, if possible, his scope was wider, she believed, than that of the first-named person. What she meant by "his scope" Honour was careful not to ask, nor could Aurora have told if she had.

But, pleased as she was with the sugar-maker, Mrs. Somers had some crotchet in her brain, concerning which it was imperatively necessary she should consult Céline without delay; so off she hopped, robin-like, and left Honour and her visitor together.

"I am afraid, Madame, that I took a liberty in waiting for you," Pellerin said; "you have been making visits, and are tired."

"I am glad you were good-natured enough to stop," she replied. She was getting so ashamed of her indifference to humanity, developed to such alarming proportions during the past weeks, that she was determined to be properly interested in people, and certainly she could find no fitter object on which to exercise such faculties as she might possess in that line than this man, who had been so genuinely kind to her.

"You are very kind to say so," he said; "but indeed I had a reason for waiting—a reason which went even beyond the wish of

having the honour of paying you my respects."

"Then you shall tell me what it was," returned she, pleasantly.

"I want to do so, yet I am afraid of paining you! Still, there are circumstances which may render it necessary for me to justify myself."

She was nervous in these days, and could not bear suspense.

"Please tell me in the plainest words possible," she said, quickly; then, afraid that her speech might have sounded abrupt, she added, "I am not quite well; then, too, you know that I have been a good deal worried—little things trouble me."

He gave her one glance of sympathy, and replied,—

"I am afraid I must trouble you still more. There is—you bade me speak plainly—gossip about your little friend Mademoiselle Galais. I never listen to such things—should not have done so in this case, only, as I unfortunately saw and heard what you did the night of your ball, I could not rest till you had admitted that you did not blame me."

"Not in the least, Monsieur Pellerin," she replied. "I was told yesterday that unpleasant

things were said. I am deeply grieved, but what to do I cannot tell."

"I am afraid you can do nothing," he replied, in a significant tone. "I am very, very sorry for her and her poor old father."

"I do not know what is repeated: everybody is sorry; yet the stories are spreading. Mademoiselle de Hauteville told me frankly that they came to her through her servants."

"As mine to me, Madame, I discharged the man at once; but I fear that did not help matters."

"In Heaven's name, where did the reports spring from?"

"I fear from Monsieur de Vieuxville's domestics. I do not know; but my man said that—I need not tell you."

"Yes; I must know what is said. I cannot help Gracieuse else."

"It seems that old Laurent, De Vieuxville's man, let out—he had been drinking too much, else he would not have done it—that Mademoiselle Galais was in the habit of visiting his master at the pavilion."

Honour turned scarlet, then very pale; but her emotion was not caused, as he supposed, by offended modesty; it was only that this confirmation of her own proofs struck her like a blow.

"I beg your pardon," he began; "I ought not—"

"I wanted to hear," she interrupted; "I thank you for being honest enough to tell me. Oh, Monsieur Pellerin, if I only knew what to do!" Then she recollected herself, and continued, "I am very fond of her and her father. She is a good girl; I am sure the reports will die away, but they would hurt them both so cruelly!"

Then she stopped. She knew in her heart that she could not defend Gracieuse, at least from the charge of imprudence; and such imprudence as she had been guilty of was a positive sin.

Monsieur Pellerin said just what was fitting and proper; but he did not hesitate to let her perceive that he had been most anxious she should not think he had been guilty of any indiscretion. Convinced of this, he could be sorry for the young lady; hint eloquently that in some way the man must be to blame, and then get away from the subject to converse upon pleasanter themes.

CHAPTER III.

GUARDING HER SECRET.

Armand de Vieuxville was acting a strangely venturesome part, and he had staked everything upon success.

Had his conduct at this time been made perfectly clear to Honour, or another, it would have been impossible for the person, however acute or skilled in business, to decide in what way he proposed ultimately to turn affairs to his own advantage.

Yet that he had such a plan and was pursuing it daringly, unscrupulously, must have seemed evident to any one who could have gained a knowledge of his proceedings.

In order to conceal the loss of the Scotch and English contract, he had employed all the capital remaining from the wreck which his father had made of his patrimony. There was a heavy mortgage on the estate, dating from the days of the old Marquis; the income accruing from the letting of the château and

the land on which the sugar factory stood, together with that from certain farms which supplied much of the beet-root to the establishment, had always been used by De Vieuxville for the payment of the interest. When he went up to Paris, during Honour's stay there, his real purpose was to raise more money. He succeeded, and was employing those sums to hide a loss caused by a second failure of his plans.

Work was going actively on, sugar manufactured, refined, and sent off, as if to fill some important contract; yet Brookes, in London had he chosen, could have told that the hogsheads lay in city warehouses, instead of being shipped (as everybody about De Vieuxville believed) in accordance with contracts upon which payments had been made in advance.

The manager pursued unfalteringly the course he had laid down for himself, although consumed with anxieties and surrounded with difficulties which would have overwhelmed a man less resolute. That some hidden power toiled incessantly against him he knew; each time he attempted to effect a sale, he was forestalled in the market; but, in spite of his acuteness, he could neither discover the source of that power, nor the means by which it worked.

When Pellerin obtained the first contracts, he had believed the Rouen sugar-maker this secret foe; but events had happened since which showed that this agency, bent on defeating him, appeared to have no special interest in aiding Monsieur Antoine.

On one occasion it was a house in England which suddenly refused to complete a purchase, though he knew they were large buyers for refining purposes; but he was assured by his broker that the name of the seller accepted instead of himself was not Pellerin. The price paid was a shade lower than that he had offered to accept. But the greatest puzzle was to know how any one could have discovered the prices at which he had proposed to sell to the firm.

Still he went on.

The mutual aversion between Pellerin and De Vieuxville could not have been stronger. Each knew or believed the other a villain, and each considered his enemy capable of any and every means to gain an end. Each felt instinctively that he possessed an implacable foe; Pellerin recognizing the fact with a fierce hatred which longed for the soothing satisfaction of revenge, De Vieuxville with something of the reckless contempt the nobles of the

ancien régime felt for the people, and could not restrain from open expression even when the once-cowed serf became master, and life and death hung in the balance.

He showed, too, the same spirit and power of endurance in the smiling composure with which he marched along the path whereon he had entered. He might—perhaps did, for he was an imaginative man—at this period have likened his position to that of one of his rank during the Reign of Terror; flung into prison, and uncertain what day he might hear the gaoler call him forth—whether to liberty or execution he could not divine even a moment in advance.

But he went on—a smile upon his lips, his proud head erect, just as the last-century noble would have strode down the prison corridor, giving no sign to the most watchful eye that he felt either anxiety or interest as to whether freedom or the tumbril waited without.

The books were arranged to present a smooth surface; ledgers and daily accounts were all in perfect order; to the very clerks, constantly occupied in the room opposite that where he spent so many solitary hours revolving his plans, the business looked flourishing and stable, and they would have been the first to

congratulate their employer upon the talent, energy, and faithfulness of her manager. Mrs. Pemberton could come any day she pleased to demand explanations, or send the clearest-headed man she could find to study the books warily, page by page, line by line—he was prepared.

But beyond—the final day of reckoning which must come sooner or later? Only the future could decide whether that day would find him face to face with ruin or success, whatever the result to Mrs. Pemberton might be. But it was too late to pause; he could not now have drawn back if he would; and I think that, in spite of his danger, the utter condemnation before the world which must follow defeat if it came unexpectedly, he never wasted one moment in regret or despondency. Honour neither came nor sent. He was left as free to pursue his course as if he had been the real and sole owner of the factory. She visited her schools, her hospital, her poor, but she did not come near him. One day De Vieuxville was obliged to go into Rouen. Honour luckily discovered it, and chose that opportunity to visit the Works; and as the manager had been suddenly called away, of course overseers and workmen had not the slightest suspicion that

Madame selected this precise opportunity because she knew of his absence.

De Vieuxville did not set foot in her dwelling, though, as the days went on, they met sometimes at the houses of mutual acquaintances —rarely, however, as he had in a great measure gone back to his former unsocial habits, and offered engrossing business as a plea for the refusal of invitations, as he made it a reason for his not visiting the château when Mrs. Somers questioned him, and declared her surprise at his absence, as she always did on every occasion that chance threw them together.

Honour had been at home almost a fortnight. Nobody among her associates seemed inclined to think ill of Gracieuse Galais, or believe the reports in regard to her; yet the stories spread and grew daily, though Monsieur de Vieuxville gained no more suspicion of them than the girl herself. The two had so long been thrown into close connexion, through her employment in the counting-house, that probably it never occurred to the man, any more than to Gracieuse, that their intercourse could suddenly have attracted attention; and if he had known (Honour thought, with anger and disgust), he would not have cared, since it must be the poor child who suffered, while he passed on un-

scathed, perhaps to receive the congratulations of his own sex on his good fortune, and be regarded by women as delightfully wicked.

Honour had seen Monsieur Galais several times—had even paid a second visit to the house; but she had not met Gracieuse. She perceived that the father remained unaware how successfully the girl avoided her, and she was careful not to betray the fact, for fear of paining him, or exciting some suspicion in his mind, which might cause him to ask questions that it would trouble Gracieuse to answer.

But, of course, she could not for any lengthened period succeed in escaping Mrs. Pemberton; and one day Honour encountered the father and daughter together. Mayne had been calling at the château; he visited her frequently, and she was fond of his society. Of course, the gossips said that a flirtation was in progress—that the young Englishman had distanced De Vieuxville in the race; but Honour knew nothing of this. She was not a woman with whom her acquaintances could venture to jest upon such a subject, and she had no friends intimate enough to hint a question, unless it might be Effie de Marsan or Mademoiselle de Hauteville; and these two preserved a discreet silence, though from

widely different reasons. The old maid was angry with Honour, because she feared that the reports in regard to De Vieuxville had lost him the young widow's esteem. She could not forgive the injustice on Honour's part, yet grew the more indignant as, in her secret soul, she began to fear the stories possessed some foundation, and that her model of manly virtues had developed certain instincts which he might easily have inherited from that Lothario, the old Marquis.

Effie held her peace, because she feared to endanger Mayne's interests by opening Honour's eyes; she hoped that her friend might drift unconsciously along; that she would not discover the danger until her heart was really touched, and so Mayne win the prize which Effie, in her affectionate solicitude, sorely coveted for him—the prize of which she felt certain De Vieuxville had lost all chance.

As to Mayne himself, it was impossible for Effie to find out what the provoking fellow hoped, or whether he were in earnest in his attentions. She could never get him to speak seriously of the matter; when she tried to talk about it, he put her off with jokes and repartees, or, if she persevered, quietly took himself

out of her presence, though never seeming in the least ruffled or vexed.

One day he had been sitting with Honour; he begged to stop for luncheon, because he declared himself ferociously hungry, and she was glad of his society. He talked well, and his unvarying high spirits amused and kept in abeyance that gloom which irritated as much as it oppressed her. There was never the slightest approach to flirtation on his part—they were good friends, and nothing more, and Honour's feminine instinct told her that he would never attempt to go beyond that, so his companionship was a pleasure and rest.

After breakfast she was going to drive out with Aurora, and Mayne accompanied them as far as the schools and hospital buildings, where Honour wished to stop for a few moments. Mrs. Somers declined getting out of the carriage, so they left her sitting in it, under the cool shadow of the beautiful elm trees which made a lofty arch above the road, and Mayne walked with Mrs. Pemberton up the ascent.

He was in one of his nonsensical moods this morning, and said all manner of heedless, witty things, after the fashion peculiar to him and Effie, and Aurora had set them both

laughing by her reasons for declining to go up to the schools.

"I don't like Papists in warm weather," she declared; "they always remind me of the Inquisition, and I feel as if I was being roasted; and that old sister you have put at the head of things, Honour, always looks me through and through, for all she hardly ever raises her eyes, and she makes me feel as if there was something wicked in me somehow, and I can't find out what it is, and am always afraid I shall ask before I know it; and as for being told my errors by an idol-worshipper —well, I have not come to need that *yet!*"

Honour despatched her business with the sisters, and then took Mayne to see some improvements she had been making in the little chapel, where the children heard mass daily.

At the doors they met Monsieur Galais and Gracieuse. The old gentleman had been in to rest after his walk, and say a quiet prayer before the altar, holding Gracieuse's hand the while. But though the girl obeyed the gentle impulse of his loving fingers, and knelt beside him as he silently breathed his humble petition —a prayer for her—she had no prayer to utter for herself. Poor girl, she was past that possi-

bility! In the fever of unrest and suffering which consumed her at this season, she feared that she could never venture to pray again, or sufficiently steady her faith, which seemed slipping from her in the gloom, to believe that God would be merciful enough to listen if she did!

So, coming out of the chapel, they met Honour and Mayne. Gracieuse grew very pale, and a sombre fire kindled in her beautiful eyes at the sight of Mrs. Pemberton. Honour spoke a few cordial words to the old gentleman, then, while he was greeting Mayne, held out a hand to Gracieuse; but Gracieuse made no response,—she looked in the lady's face with the defiant trouble which had hardened her countenance the day of their last painful interview, and did not open her lips.

"You have come to show Gerard Mayne the pretty coloured window, I suppose?" Monsieur Galais said, turning toward Honour again.

"Yes; I am so glad you like it," she replied.

He followed into the church, and Gracieuse was obliged to go also, though she stood aloof in sullen silence, while the others talked; and even some jest, which Mayne uttered in too low a tone to shock the old gentleman's ears by its

unfitness in that place, scarcely won a smile from her, though Honour had considerable difficulty to keep her facial muscles in order.

They all walked down the hill together, Monsieur Galais as bright and cheerful as possible, for he had been feeling much better during the past week.

"My busy little pigeon at last found leisure yesterday to go over to the château to pay you her respects, Madame," he said.

Honour glanced in surprise at Gracieuse; the girl's eyes grew still more stormy as she steadily returned the look. Just as he spoke, Monsieur Galais dropped his stick. Mayne stooped to pick it up for him; to pluck also a scarlet poppy which had attracted the old man's attention, and which he begged his young friend to gather.

The two ladies walked on; they gained a considerable advance of the gentlemen.

"I told my father a falsehood. I did not go near your house!" Gracieuse said suddenly, in a tone whose very repression rendered its passion more startling.

"I am sorry you did not," Honour answered, patiently, determined that nothing should ever again induce her to yield to anger against the poor girl; "very sorry. Oh, Gracieuse, Gra-

cieuse! why can you not believe in me?—why can you not see that I want to be your friend —that I love you?"

"You my friend!" she exclaimed. "I'll not have you so! I am nothing to you—I am not even your paid servant any more—I have refused the salary: you have no right over me in any way!"

She spoke very rapidly—scarcely above a whisper—but the anger in her voice, the rage in her face, with an inexplicable trouble breaking through the wrath, shocked Honour inexpressibly. Before she could answer, Mayne and Monsieur Galais were close to them again, and the old gentleman was showing Honour the poppy, and relating some incident of his childish days which the sight of the flower had roused.

They reached the carriage. Mrs. Somers paid her little bird-like greetings to father and daughter; Mayne helped Honour in, and she spoke a few general words of farewell. She said something about being behind time as a reason for her haste, but in reality she was afraid that if she lingered Gracieuse might give vent to an outburst which would startle and pain her father.

Honour's heart grew heavy indeed as she

drove away. She felt at length convinced that it was utterly hopeless ever to think of winning back the girl's affection, of aiding her in any manner. Probably at first Gracieuse had been jealous of the intimacy between her and De Vieuxville; now, no doubt the man had given his version of the estrangement, and Gracieuse resented her interference; possibly, according to women's habit, more angry at Honour's suspicions of her lover than where she was herself concerned.

Gracieuse's lover!

To find herself mentally uttering the words caused Honour an icy chill—not of personal pain—she was only thinking of Gracieuse. Her lover,—could he be that honourably, openly? Honour knew his pride of caste too well for an instant to find comfort in the hope whose possibility had alarmed old Mademoiselle de Hauteville. He would never dream of marrying the girl—he would not do it to save her reputation or her soul. It was horrible! Her own doubts, unavoidable as they were, knowing what she did, seemed a shame to her womanhood and a fiendish cruelty to the unprotected girl. It was horrible—and she so helpless, though she would have given everything she possessed in the world if she could have persuaded Gracieuse

to take her hand and be led away from the perils which surrounded her.

Mayne stood by the father and daughter watching the carriage. The old gentleman had to indulge in a few ecstatic praises in regard to his dear Madame Pemberton, then he said,—

"My little Gracieuse, I should like to go over to the counting-house."

"You will be too tired, papa," she replied; "it is very warm—I am nearly dead already."

"You look weary," he said, patting her shoulder; "go you up to the house, my pretty one. What are you meaning to do, *vaurien?*" he continued, turning to Mayne, whose bright, merry ways and quick sympathies had greatly endeared him to the old man.

"To give you my arm to the counting-house," Gerard answered; "then, if Mademoiselle Gracieuse will permit, I shall follow her home, in order to get some books I lent her, if she has done with them."

"I can send the package over to Monsieur de Marsan's," returned Gracieuse, rather curtly, and moved away.

Mayne accompanied Monsieur Galais, who talked with unusual animation; too content, under the genial warmth of the day and his

freedom from physical pain, to notice as quickly as he usually did any slight change in Gracieuse's manner. Indeed, he had grown much less observant lately; this breaking-up of bodily strength had probably somewhat dulled, though it had not in the least weakened, his mental faculties.

Mayne left him at the door, and bounded off in pursuit of Gracieuse. She was half-way up the acacia-shaded approach to the house before he overtook her.

"You are as difficult to catch as a live nautilus!" he called, laughing, as he reached her. "Let us go and sit down in the summer-house; it will be nice and cool there."

"I thought you were coming to get your books," returned she, smiling and pouting at the same time; looking as if she were not exactly certain whether she wanted him to go or stay.

"But you were so magnificent in your politeness that you offered to send them over to the Hermitage," he said. "I don't know how Mathieu may like it! Manette will have to go, to keep him from losing his wig, or being led into some dreadful scrape by that fiendish wooden leg."

"There are things in the world more

fiendish," said she, "and Madame Pemberton is one of them. I hate that woman—I hate her!"

She set her little white teeth hard together, and uttered the words with true southern melodramatic earnestness.

Mayne looked at her in surprise; but answered playfully, as if trying to think it a jest,—

"Come and rest comfortably, and tell me why you are so energetic on a warm day."

She allowed him to lead her into the summer-house, and seated herself on the bench, though she did not reply to his question.

"Why do you hate Madame Pemberton?" he asked.

"I shall not tell you; but I do!" she exclaimed. "Oh, how I hate her!"

"Why, Gracieuse!" he said; "what has come over you? I don't know you in this mood."

"I have many moods that you do not know," she replied hotly; "but they do not concern you, so we will let them pass."

"I would try to let that hatred you speak of pass also," he said, gravely. He had been looking admiringly at her beauty, but a shadow crossed his face, as if this exhibition of passion almost revolted him.

"I shall *not* try," retorted she, "and I warn you I am in no humour to be lectured to-day by anybody. It seems to me that lately every one thinks it his or her right."

"I did not mean to lecture," he replied, soothingly. "After all, Madame Pemberton is nothing to you or me. We need neither hate nor love her."

"Is she not? She is so much to me that I loathe her, and always shall. I have told her so."

"Told her so? When? Why?"

"No matter; I do not choose to tell. I wish you would not teaze me."

"I did not come, certainly, to teaze you."

"I don't know what for, then! You all come to-day to misunderstand and outrage me!"

For an instant it seemed that he had to struggle not to give way to his hasty temper, under the strain of her unreasonable accusations, but the anger speedily faded from his face, and he whispered,—

"I love you, Gracieuse; you know that I love you!"

"And I?" she cried. "My God, I think I hate the whole world! Go away. I do not want to hear of anybody's love."

Her manner, which was that of a person trying to conceal a mortal terror under an assumption of pettishness, brought the cloud back to his forehead, and a sudden angry, suspicious light into his eyes.

"Anybody's?" he repeated. "So I am not the only one who has let his heart out before you. Perhaps I came too late."

"Do you mean to suspect and insult me?" demanded she, so near a burst of bitter weeping that only by a pretence of anger could she retain her self-control. It was poor acting, but, in the impatience of youth, Mayne rushed into an excitement too violent for him to notice the effort which would have been so apparent to another. Still he tried to subdue his agitation.

"You cannot think that," he began; but she interrupted him.

"You do! That wretch of a Pellerin has been talking, and you have listened. I will never forgive you for it!" she exclaimed.

"What do you know about Pellerin, that you should think so?" he asked.

"Nothing," she replied, quickly; "I never spoke half-a-dozen times to him in my life: but you are always together; and—and—he is

the most disagreeable person I ever saw! Besides—"

"Besides?" he repeated, when she hesitated. "Ah, you will not say it—then I shall! Because he hates that accursed prig of a De Vieuxville!"

"The last time you spoke to me, I told you never to mention his name!" retorted Gracieuse. "You begin by talking of your love—a man's love. Bah! Then you insult me, as you have done before."

"Because I am jealous of him! There, you know the truth!" he cried, with an angry misery in his face which an ordinary observer would hardly have believed his features could express.

"Jealous?" she repeated; and now her tone sounded as if she were seeking to hide terror under an affectation of surprise.

"Yes; I am! I love you! you know I love you! I feel as if that man stood between us; as if— Gracieuse, tell me the whole truth! I swear I will believe you!"

"There is nothing to tell," she answered. "I have known Monsieur de Vieuxville a long time. I—" She broke off, abruptly; after an instant she continued, "Do you expect me to defend myself? Do you dare to hint there

is a necessity? I'll not do it. I'll die first! I wish I was dead!—oh, I do wish it!"

She buried her face in her hands, and burst into a passion of tears. He was frightened by the violence of her emotion, and tried to soothe her with tender words and promises, but in vain.

"I'll find out what it means!" he cried, his patience giving way anew. "By Heaven! he shall tell me, if you will not!"

He had not intended to speak the last words audibly, but she caught them. She raised her face, suddenly grown pallid, wiped away her tears, and tried to say, playfully,—

"You are a wicked fellow to torment me! I am not well. You might have a little mercy." Then she added, below her breath, "You would if you knew—if you knew!"

Mayne's jealous feelings were not the result of the gossip that was going the rounds of the neighbourhood; oddly enough, he had heard nothing of that, though Gracieuse had hit the truth when she declared her belief that he had been listening to Pellerin's evil insinuations, so artfully administered that he scarcely knew how to distinguish between his own fancies and his friend's inuendoes.

"I don't want to torment you," he said; "it breaks my heart to see you unhappy! You

are so unlike yourself; you talk in such an exaggerated way! When you speak of Mrs. Pemberton—"

"Ah!" broke in Gracieuse. "I hear enough, and too much of her. If you can talk of nothing else, I wish you would go."

"It seems to me every subject I name is prohibited," retorted he. Then he struggled hard again to control himself, and added, "God knows I did not come here to quarrel!"

"Everybody quarrels with me," sobbed Gracieuse, "everybody, and always on account of that odious woman. Nobody is kind to me but poor Doctor Jean. Ah, he was good! He did not doubt me! He loved me; yes, he did! He would have understood and pitied me! Why, he asked me to be his wife; and—and—"

"I see your father coming up the path," interrupted Gerard, his voice trembling with rage and pain. "He told me that he meant you should marry your cousin, or rather he let me see it, in his innocent way. He will be delighted to find you in so yielding a mood; you had better tell him at once."

But before he had finished his sneering speech, Gracieuse was gone, without giving him so much as a word or a look.

CHAPTER IV.

"I PROMISE!"

GERARD MAYNE was not left much longer in ignorance of the gossip in regard to Gracieuse Galais. The vague stories grew, and gained consistency, though how, nobody could have told, any more than by what means they were first put in circulation.

Honour was visiting Effie one day, and the two were discussing the matter, sadly enough, for, selfish as she might be, Effie could feel keenly for the unfortunate girl. Honour had told her frankly of the manner in which she had been repulsed by Gracieuse, and Effie did not hesitate to put into words the suspicion which had risen in Mrs. Pemberton's own mind; the poor child was jealous, and so thrust from her the one friendly hand which might have been able to support and uphold her.

"The stories get worse every day," Effie said; "if poor little Gracieuse had a brother—anybody to defend her—he would have to take

the business up, and punish that miserable De Vieuxville as he deserves."

Mayne had entered the room without either of them being aware, and heard the speech. He scarcely waited to greet the guest, before he turned to Effie and insisted upon knowing what she meant.

"After all, it is no secret," Effie said; "I only wonder you have not heard the whole story already,"—and she told it.

Mayne listened very quietly; both ladies were inclined to be offended with him because he seemed to consider the affair of such slight consequence. He was the first to talk of other matters. He had come in to tell his cousin that he was going to Rouen, and should not be back till the next day; he was engaged to a man's supper-party, and the festivity was certain to last until very late.

He sat for a while conversing in his usual animated, heedless fashion, then bade them good-bye, and went off to say adieu to De Marsan, as he wished to catch the next train.

When he reached Rouen, he drove directly to Monsieur Pellerin's house, and the conversation which ensued increased Mayne's wrath to a greater height.

De Vieuxville was at the supper; he had not

intended accepting the invitation, but he chanced to be obliged to go into the town, and the host captured him, and would hear of no refusal.

The enjoyment of the evening was disturbed by an altercation between De Vieuxville and Gerard Mayne. It began over some vexed question at the whist-table. De Vieuxville would not quarrel; but the other's language became very intemperate, and finally the Marquis was goaded into saying several exceedingly cutting things, and Monsieur Pellerin made matters worse by endeavouring to quiet the discussion.

It was evident to everybody that some personal feeling which had nothing to do with the affair in hand, animated both Mayne and De Vieuxville; but as men in these days do not fight duels over trifles, it did not occur to any of the listeners that the present difficulty would be used as a pretext for a future meeting.

However, the next day Monsieur Pellerin presented himself at the counting-house, and was shown into De Vieuxville's private room. The visit was so surprising an occurrence that the Marquis knew it could have no ordinary object, nor did Pellerin leave him a moment in doubt. He explained, in frigidly courteous

language, that he appeared on behalf of his friend Monsieur Mayne; that gentleman considered himself grossly insulted by the conduct of Monsieur le Marquis on the previous evening, and it was desirable that he should name some friend with whom Monsieur Pellerin could confer without delay.

De Vieuxville remained contemptuously haughty; neither asked questions nor attempted explanations. He referred Monsieur Pellerin to a young officer, whose regiment was stationed at Rouen, and coldly bowed him out of the apartment.

After his unwelcome visitor had gone, Armand sat by the table, leaning his head on both arms, lost in deep and painful thought. The door which communicated with the apartment reserved for the mistress of the sugar factory (an apartment nowadays swept and garnished by old Robert at a useless expenditure of strength, since the owner never entered it) opened, and Gracieuse Galais entered.

She walkad softly forward, laid her hand on De Vieuxville's shoulder, and roused him from his reverie, which had been so absorbing that he had not heard her step. His face showed that his first feeling was one of annoyance at the interruption, but it changed to an

expression of trouble as he looked at her. She was white as death, her great eyes dilated with anguish and terror. She let her hand fall to her side; her head drooped, like a person worn out by fatigue; she said, in a slow, painful voice,—

"I heard every word that man said! You are going to fight a duel with Gerard Mayne! You shall not do it—I say you shall not!"

"I am sorry you heard," he answered, with a weary patience in his tone. "I do not think I was in the wrong; the whole affair has been forced upon me from first to last."

"Pellerin is at the bottom of it," she half whispered; "I know he is."

"I think that very possible; but, if he is, it changes nothing."

"You will not fight him!" she exclaimed, not raising her voice, though its repressed agony was more piteous than any cry could have been. "I say you shall not—I will not allow it."

"The matter may be arranged," he said. "I have referred him to Herbault; he is a sensible fellow. The whole thing was over a mere trifle; very likely it will be settled."

"You know better," returned she. "You know the quarrel was only a pretext. You

are going to fight about me. I tell you it shall not be! Do you hear? It shall not!"

"You must keep yourself quiet," he said, rather sternly. "You can do no good by rushing into an excitement. Since there was no apparent reason but the discussion over the cards, it is probable the matter can have no serious consequences."

She flung up her hands, and groaned.

"Oh my God! my God!" she cried. "I was nearly mad before. This is too much—too much! Armand de Vieuxville, promise me—I beg you on my knees—promise that you will not fight this duel!"

She sank on the floor beside him. He tried to raise her, but she clung fast to the arm of his chair with both hands. "Armand,—my good, dear Armand,—promise—promise!"

"Get up, Gracieuse. For Heaven's sake, don't do that!" he said. "I will try everything in my power; I will see Herbault; I will offer any excuse a man can—"

"None will be accepted," she broke in, "and you know it. You are trying to deceive me—to put me off."

"I tell you I shall do all I can," he repeated, impatiently.

"You will not promise?"

"It is a promise that I have given."

She started to her feet.

"If you fight him, or any one else, on my account—and it will be for that—I'll kill myself!" she cried. "Yes, I will. I have been tempted many times lately to do it, and now I will."

"Gracieuse, Gracieuse!"

"I mean it,—you know I do! I'll follow you—I shall find out. I will kill myself on the ground where you meet! I'll tell the truth, and then die. Maybe God will be kinder to me than man has been."

She did mean every word. It was only necessary to look at her to be certain of that. She had not raised her voice; it was scarcely more than a whisper still; but the low, monotonous tone was positively terrible from its force and resolution.

What moved him,—pity for her suffering? the threat she had uttered of telling the truth? He rose from his seat, and walked slowly up and down the room. She did not stir, did not glance toward him; her heavy eyes were fixed on vacancy; her face rigid and set, as if the features had frozen with that anguish upon them.

De Vieuxville had fought in two wars, had

shown himself brave even to recklessness; no lack of courage could be imputed as a reason for his desire to escape the duel; yet men would sneer, and affect to believe that his resolve proceeded from cowardice. He knew this, and the knowledge made a poltroon of him in a certain way, as it would have done of any man. He was afraid of the consequences of a refusal. He could not bear to contemplate the possibility of living under the imputation of being a coward.

Presently he heard her voice again. She had not moved. The tone was the same, choked and difficult; but the unalterable determination rang through it still.

"Am I to die?" she asked. "Not I only—my father, my poor old father! Well, murder us—for you will have done it—perhaps it is the kindest thing you could do."

"For God's sake!—"

"Don't name Him!" she interrupted. "So you will not promise—you will not? Then—"

"Gracieuse, my poor Gracieuse!" he cried, with a sudden yearning pathos in his voice.

She shuddered from head to foot. He thought she was about to fall, and hurried forward to support her. She retreated, catching at the table to hold herself steady.

"Don't look at me!" she whispered. "I shall have to tell you: turn your head away—don't look! What you just called me—can't you understand? I did not know till the other day! Nothing will move you—I must tell! Armand, Armand! promise, promise — for my child's sake—for my unborn baby—promise!"

Then she sank forward upon the table. He lifted her, and placed her in a chair. His face was almost as death-like as hers, but he did not lose his presence of mind. He crossed the room, and locked the door which gave upon the corridor—so that they were secure from intrusion—brought a carafe of water from his desk, and bathed her forehead as gently as a woman could have done. Many moments elapsed before her consciousness returned: she opened her eyes with a wandering stare.

"Gracieuse, I promise!" he whispered, "I swear! Nothing—no power under heaven—shall induce me to break my oath."

She seized his hand, and pressed it to her lips, then shrank away from his touch, as he laid his other hand upon her head and bent toward her.

"Let me go," she said, wearily; "I want to go."

"Come into the next room, and rest on the sofa for a while," he pleaded.

"Yes; but don't stay—let me be alone just for a little—all alone."

She allowed him to help her into the adjoining apartment, and she lay down upon the couch, covering her eyes with both hands.

He stood for an instant looking at her with a wistful tenderness in his face, yet mingled therewith an expression of strange impatience, as if some evil thought tugged at his heart, and would not be subdued either by pity or remorse.

Then, without speaking a word, he went out of the chamber.

Two hours afterward he was in Rouen, and closeted with Captain Herbault, who had a short time before received a visit from Pellerin. An astounded man was the gallant young captain when he learned the errand which had brought his proposed principal upon the scene; and though he remained civil and courteous, De Vieuxville knew that he was encountering the first bitter wind of wondering contempt which must hiss so cruelly about his ears from every quarter when the story should become public. The captain showed consideration enough; promised voluntarily to do his best to have the

matter kept secret, thus unwittingly betraying his opinion of the light in which De Vieuxville's conduct would be regarded. But his listener knew only too well that, however Mayne might behave, Antoine Pellerin was not the person to let the affair pass without doing his enemy all the injury he could.

De Vieuxville did not err in his surmises. Within three days the whole neighbourhood had heard the story. Mayne was called suddenly away to England — his grandmother was very ill, and he had to start at once —so that even if he had felt disposed to check Pellerin's malicious version of the business, it was out of his power.

Mademoiselle de Hauteville was seated in the gloomiest room in all the length and breadth of the gloomy old château where she held such despotic sway over her brother and the knot of domestics grown grey and ancient in the service of her family. Mademoiselle called this haunt of shadows her *cabinet de travail*. She kept her accounts in a great desk which looked like a tomb. There was not an article of furniture that had not existed at least two centuries, not a chair more comfortable than a rack would have been, and the floor, the hardest-hearted parquet ever invented,

waxed to a pitch which made it necessary for any one who wished to cross it to slide. The windows were high up and narrow; a great clump of cedar-trees grew outside, so that no ray of sunlight ever penetrated the dismal place, and even cast-iron Mademoiselle could not sit there in the height of summer without a fire. The walls above the black oak wainscoting were hung with faded, tattered tapestries, representing religious subjects, of so gloomy a nature—martyred saints, glimpses of unfortunate sinners in purgatory, heretics suffering condign punishment at the hands of zealous Papists, and the like—that to stand in the room made one feel as if in the presence of an *auto-da-fé*. Mademoiselle seldom entered the apartment, except when in a bad humour; then she was seized with a mania for arranging her accounts; and when they heard the order given for a fire to be kindled in that refuge from the weariness of a world which had not been too pleasant to the old maid, every creature in the house shuddered, from her brother down to the scullion: a tempest was at hand.

To-day Mademoiselle sat there, busy at her desk till the failing light forced her to relinquish the labour of studying her own crabbed

chirography — almost illegible even to her, after she had forgotten what the hieroglyphics might have originally been intended to represent. She had the largest round pair of spectacles on her beak of a nose that ever human being sported, and her venerable head was decorated with a cap apparently built on the model of the ancestral casque in which De Marsan once sketched her—so stiff and uncompromising from border to crown that it seemed impossible any material so soft and yielding as lawn could have entered into its fabrication.

The door opened quickly, and her brother appeared on the threshold, calling, in his nervous treble,—

"Désirée! are you here, Désirée?"

Mademoiselle knew that something of importance must have occurred to bring him hither; he never set foot in the place if he could avoid it, and shivered at the mention of it; as, indeed, he had reason, for before and after his sister's periods of seclusion in that chamber the poor little man's life was rendered a burden by her merciless tongue, which did not cease its record of all his errors of commission and omission, real or imaginary, his natural incompetence and his idiotic

neglect of such feeble advantages as Nature had vouchsafed him, until he felt as if he had been flayed from head to foot.

But here he was, voluntarily appearing on the threshold of this dread sanctum, piping,—"Are you here, Désirée?"

Mademoiselle was as nearly startled as her nerves would permit; but she answered in her deepest bass voice—else it sounded more sonorous than usual, from its contrast to Monsieur's shrill, canary-bird tones,—

"Of course I am here, as you must know if you have eyes in your head, or are not too stupid to open them! Where else should I be, after having had a fire kindled this morning? Whatever *my* faults may be, they are not those of wanton extravagance and wicked waste."

This was a fling at Monsieur, which dated back twenty years. He had once spent a few thousand francs in a journey to Italy (having been given to romance in his youth), and Mademoiselle always made this expenditure a heavy item in her indictment against him.

"No, certainly not, Désirée," he faltered. "But the fire is out—it is very cold here—would you mind going into the *salon?*"

"I should not mind your going there in the least, but I do not propose to stir," retorted Mademoiselle, vexed with herself for feeling curiosity in regard to his errand, and exasperated with him because he did not tell it at once; though all the hideous shapes in the tapestry, if they had started into life and assaulted her in concert, could not have tortured her into asking a question.

"I wanted to speak to you," returned Monsieur.

"You are speaking, I think," observed Mademoiselle. "I presume my ears do not deceive me." He still lingered on the threshold, and she suddenly changed from a tone of sarcastic politeness to a hoarse growl.

"Come in or go out; any way, shut that door."

"Yes, Désirée."

"Good gracious! did you come for the pleasure of screaming my name, like a parrot?"

"No, Désirée." He did not repeat her baptismal appellation to annoy her, as most persons would have done under the circumstances, but from pure nervousness. Then she growled anew, and this rendered him so much more nervous that he would have run away had he dared.

"Wrap yourself in that table-cover," ordered Mademoiselle; "you shiver like a featherless chicken! Wrap yourself up, I say; else I'll do it for you."

He did not venture to refuse; he instantly muffled his odd little figure in the old *tapis*, presenting an aspect so ludicrous that, in spite of her ill-humour, Mademoiselle had great difficulty not to laugh.

"Do—do you believe in duels, Désirée?" he asked, suddenly, after a hesitation, during which his sister had been wondering how many seconds longer she could endure the suspense without doing violence to her sex and her lineage by shaking him soundly.

"Am I a pagan?" cried she. "What have you got in your ridiculous bewigged head now, I should like to know?"

"I—I wanted to hear your opinion," faltered Monsieur, wrapping himself closer in his table-cover, while his teeth chattered, between fright and cold, till he could scarcely articulate.

"Well, you have heard it," returned she.

"P-pardon," stammered Monsieur; "not yet."

"Did I not ask you whether I was a pagan?" demanded Mademoiselle, fiercely.

"That you certainly are not; still—"

"Then you have answered your own question," interrupted Mademoiselle, in a tone of triumph. "If I am not, of course I disapprove of duels."

"Ah!" quavered Monsieur. "Always?"

"Now look you, Hilaire Adolf Etienne Jean Marie de Hauteville," cried Mademoiselle, running off his numerous baptismal appellations with startling fluency, "what do you mean by this sort of cross-questioning? Am I woman to be browbeaten?"

"God knows you are not!" sighed he.

"Then why do you attempt it?" she asked, apparently mollified by his doubtful compliment. "Duels are a relic of a barbarous age: formerly they were necessary; our grandfather fought ten—one of our great uncles fourteen." Here she became aware that her voice had waxed too triumphant, displaying a certain pride in these bloodthirsty tendencies on the part of their ancestors. She paused, adding, in a solemn bass, "They walked according to their lights! It is not for us to judge, poor worms that we are!"

Monsieur evidently objected to being classed among that particular species of creature, and, to express his disapproval—he did not dare put in words—he wriggled back and forth till the

table-cover twisted about him so closely that it gave him a certain resemblance to a fat caterpillar.

"Duels in our day are out of place—a positive sin," pursued Mademoiselle. "Now what led to all these interrogatories? I suppose nobody has asked you to fight; and I do not suppose you wish to ask anybody on your own account: so what is it?"

"That young Englishman, Monsieur Mayne, challenged De Vieuxville, and the Marquis declined," said the little man, all in a breath.

Mademoiselle bounded out of her chair; her cap border stood erect.

"What?" she cried, in a voice of thunder.

"He refused," quavered Monsieur, shrinking into a corner of the sofa, and making himself very small indeed.

"A De Vieuxville? *C'est un mensonge!*" shouted Mademoiselle, shaking her fist in the air. "Who said it?"

"Everybody knows it. I was told to-day in Rouen—I met De Vieuxville, and asked him point blank."

"Did he admit it?"

"Y-yes, Désirée."

Mademoiselle gave another bound, and he shrank still further into his corner.

"*Lâche!—Poltron!—le*—Oh, I shall choke!" groaned the old maid, rushing up and down the room to work off a little of her excitement, for fear of bursting a blood-vessel. As soon as she felt that she could do so in safety, she sat down again, and ordered her brother to tell everything he knew; and he had heard the whole story from Pellerin himself.

"Pellerin—that *sans culotte*—that son of a shoeblack!" cried Mademoiselle, glad to have an object upon which to vent her wrath. "Oh, I foresee that I shall have to horsewhip somebody at last—it is my destiny."

"W-whom?" gasped Monsieur.

"Whom? Ah, that is what I should like to find out—then I could be easier in my mind," rejoined the spinster.

"My dear, you do not think what you are saying," moaned the little man; "if our grandmother could hear you!"

"Bah!" shouted Mademoiselle, past caring, even, for the opinion of the ancestress whose memory she adored. "Let our grandmother lie quiet in her grave where she belongs, and she will know nothing about the matter."

She raged up and down the room; she used such very strong language that, had she not

been a religious woman and a lady, poor Monsieur, trembling in his shoes, would have thought it uncommonly like swearing. She ended by making her bass voice so hoarse that it sounded as if it came from the cellar, and its echoes pierced to the furthest end of the great corridor, and roused the butler, who happened to be standing there, to acute sympathy for his unfortunate master.

Finally, Mademoiselle turned sharply on the last male descendant of the house of Hautefille—told him he had talked more than enough about the matter (he had not opened his lips, except to gasp for full twenty minutes)—that any way it was none of his business, and that she forbade his mentioning the subject again to her or anybody else.

Poor Monsieur secretly vowed that, whatever happened, he would never more bring his sister unpleasant tidings. Before bed-time, as they sat in the great *salon*, she roused herself out of a reverie, during whose progress she had troubled his doze by sudden starts and rumblings in her throat, like distant thunder, to assure him that he had taken cold, and was served rightly for intruding into her *cabinet de travail* when she was occupied. Expostulations were in vain; Monsieur had to swallow a huge dose of violet

tea, which his soul abhorred, and was sent to bed in disgrace.

The next day appeared Madame de Chantal, and divers others of the relics of grand families, to discuss the report. They could do this when no unworthy outsiders were present. Mademoiselle had mounted her war-turban—a marvellous and appalling piece of workmanship, about the size of a modern band-box, rendered more awful by a black plume with a scarlet tip. They were all acquainted with this head-gear, and all afraid of her when she appeared under its shadow. They comprehended, from her terse speeches, that whatever she or they might think, there was only one opinion to be expressed by them, and every person in the neighbourhood who desired to retain the light of her countenance. Monsieur de Vieuxville had behaved well—consistently.

"It is that odious Madame de Marsan's fault in some way," pronounced Madame de Chantal; and everybody agreed with her.

The morning after, Mademoiselle had herself hoisted into the antique chariot, and drove over to the château of Vieuxville. Honour was glad to see her. The old woman boldly plunged into the subject, and declared that her favourite had behaved nobly.

"Prudently, at least," returned Honour, with a smile.

Mademoiselle read her a lecture, to which she listened patiently. She had a horror of duels; all the same she despised De Vieuxville.

Many people declared that the quarrel had risen in regard to Madame Pemberton. The grandees were glad of this—glad of any tale which might turn the current of scandal from the Marquis and Gracieuse; and, besides, this view of the case gave a really good reason for the manager's refusal—he could not on any terms risk compromising the young widow, his employer.

To De Vieuxville himself none of them mentioned the matter; nor did he vouchsafe the least explanation. He was very busy, and seldom seen outside his place of business; but, when he did appear, he showed himself as calm and impassible as ever.

CHAPTER V.

"GOOD DAY, MONSIEUR FLANDIN."

THERE was a general exodus among the idle portion of the neighbourhood for the remaining weeks of August. Even Mademoiselle de Hauteville, who seldom left home—partly from motives of economy, and partly because she detested travelling — took her amiable little brother under her wing, and departed to visit some distant relatives in Brittany.

Effie de Marsan and Honour chanced to meet the pair, perched up in the ancient chariot, on their way to the station; and any object so appalling as Mademoiselle in a travelling costume had never met their eyes. The spinster prided herself on the fact of not having changed the fashion of her robes or bonnets for ten years. Her grandmother had made that rule for herself when she reached fifty, and Mademoiselle had adopted it in her turn, and believed firmly that no really virtuous, well-regulated woman would act upon any other.

Poor little Monsieur sat nearly smothered beneath the wraps in which she had enveloped him; but though his face was bathed in perspiration, till, when he lifted his hat to salute the ladies, his wig looked like a small island in the midst of a waterfall, he dared not so much as loosen a button.

Mademoiselle looked very grim, and at first seemed inclined to pay no attention to the fact that Honour had checked her ponies, with the intention of speaking. But the old maid relented somewhat, under the influence of Mrs. Pemberton's cordial wishes of a pleasant journey, and was even tolerably gracious to Effie.

The next morning the two set off in their turn. De Marsan was to accompany them to Trouville, but only to stop for a couple of days. He proposed to go to the Channel Islands with an artist friend, and remain till his wife and Honour were ready to return home.

Effie had been very sweet and amiable, but her husband's resolution to see them safe to Trouville was not pleasant to her. Madame de Chantal had gone in an opposite direction, and Effie had led Léon to believe that Arthur had accompanied his mother with the intention of staying. But, as ill-luck would have it, the

young gentleman appeared at Trouville the very evening De Marsan was to leave, and hurried to the hotel to greet Madame before going to pay his homage to his betrothed. So Léon had to go away feeling that his wife had equivocated, if not told a downright falsehood. But he went without a quarrel, or speaking a harsh word. Acute as Effie was, she ought to have known this reticence was a very dangerous sign, but she did not take the trouble to think about it; probably, had she done so, her way of regarding his conduct would have been to tell herself that she was glad to have peace on any terms.

Had Madame de Chantal been aware of her enemy's presence at Trouville, she certainly would not have allowed her son to go there alone; but a fortnight elapsed before the knowledge reached her—a fortnight in which Arthur had managed, by his open devotion to Effie de Marsan, to offend his future father-in-law, however blind his *fiancée* might remain.

Effie drove the boy wild by her coquetries with other men, and then did imprudent things in her efforts to comfort him. One of Madame de Chantal's confidential tabbies came to Trouville, and, as soon as she discovered what was

going on, conceived it her duty to write to the mother, and detail the reckless manner in which Arthur was endangering his prospects. Probably old Madame would have been wiser to stay where she was; but the suspense and fears could not be borne, and she hastened to put herself on the scene of action, in the hope of restraining her son.

To complicate matters, she arrived at a time when Monsieur Flandin was in a fresh and deeper state of irritation than ever. That very day, Mathilde and her aunt had gone upon an excursion with some friends, and, at the last moment, Monsieur Flandin discovered that Arthur had excused himself from accompanying them on the plea of indisposition. Mathilde bore the disappointment very well; but her father perceived that her pleasure was spoiled, and, pompous and selfish as he was, he loved her too well to see her crossed with equanimity. He was prevented going by the arrival of important business letters which must be answered immediately. After he had finished his correspondence, he strolled out upon the *plage*, to enjoy the cool breeze of the approaching sunset, and in a retired nook came upon Effie de Marsan and Arthur—the latter certainly exhibiting no signs of physical suffering which

could have warranted him in breaking his engagement with Mathilde.

The ex-stockbroker's brow looked very dark and angry as he saluted the lady, and his voice was sharp and stern as he said to Arthur,—

"I am glad to see you have so speedily recovered from your illness of the morning, Monsieur de Chantal."

His words and manner naturally irritated Arthur all the more that this implied calling to account took place in Effie's presence, and he caught her smile, half pitying, half amused.

"I am quite well," he replied: "the weather is altogether too hot for excursions of any sort."

"I understood you had promised to accompany my daughter and her aunt," returned Flandin, with a lack of *savoir faire* of which a more polished man could not have been guilty.

The haughty De Chantal blood mounted to Arthur's forehead; his eyes flashed so hotly that the old stockbroker was a little startled, and of course the angrier for that very reason.

"I presume it is possible for you to be occasionally mistaken, Monsieur," said he, with cold insolence.

"Except on the Bourse," added Effie, laughing, apparently unconscious that anything

was wrong. "Monsieur Flandin is infallible there."

"I do not happen to be familiar with that pandemonium," observed Arthur, contemptuously.

Flandin turned as red as a turkey-cock; he was not good at repartee, and, angry as he was, could not lecture Arthur before Madame de Marsan; indeed, dissatisfied as he had been of late, he had never got his courage up to the point of lecturing at all. His snobbish worship of blood and station caused him to stand a little in awe of Arthur's cool, indifferent ways, though he tried to hide it under an affectation of familiarity which galled the young man's very soul.

He did not exactly know what to do or say, so he lifted his hat again to the lady, darted a furious glance at De Chantal, and stalked away; that is, he tried to stalk, but his lack of height and superabundant stomach made his gait a waddle. To add to his rage, before he had gone ten steps he heard Effie's gay laugh ring out, and Arthur's answer it; and he hurried on, troubled by the uncomfortable suspicion that their merriment was at his expense.

"What a foolish boy you were to stop at

home!" she said, after they had shocked the retreating broker's ears by their irreverent mirth. "There will be a scene when he catches you alone."

"I fancy he will scarcely venture upon such impertinence," returned Arthur, stiffly. "If he should—"

"Don't threaten!" she interrupted. "You must not quarrel with him, Arthur! Remember, your whole future is at stake: have patience!"

"Patience! I hate the word!" he cried.

"Like everybody else; but you will have to cultivate the quality itself," she said, with a sigh.

"I shall not submit to that old idiot's insolence in order to acquire it," he answered. "I wish to Heaven he would take offence, and end the whole business; it grows more loathsome to me every day."

"Arthur, Arthur!"

"I do! I know I shall never be able to go on with it. I am utterly miserable, and I despise myself."

It was so evidently her duty to soothe him out of this rebellious mood, that Effie could not hesitate, and their talk wandered away from Monsieur Flandin and his daughter.

That irate gentleman returned to the hotel, and found Madame de Chantal just arrived. Flandin was too angry to be prudent; and he poured out the whole story of his and his daughter's wrongs in language more energetic than elegant. Madame, in addition to the fatigue of her journey (rendered doubly wearisome by her anxieties), was in a very bad humour at finding the crowded state of the hotel forced her to put up with one small, uncomfortable chamber, for which she had to pay a price her purse could ill afford.

In spite of her anger with Arthur, she could not help defending him: justifiable as she knew Monsieur Flandin's wrath was, she could not hinder herself feeling outraged to think of this *roturier* having the right to find fault with her son. They came very near a quarrel; but, luckily, both were able to remember in time how much depended on keeping control of their tempers; so they found a vent for passion in abuse of Madame de Marsan, and, being somewhat calmed by this recreation, proceeded to consult as to the ways and means of removing Arthur from her influence.

The old lady had sent no warning of her intentions, so when the young vicomte returned to his lodgings, the news of her arrival proved

a surprise as great as it was unpleasant. His first idea was that Flandin had sent for her to come and reduce him to obedience; and that thought rendered him more rebellious. He went over to the hotel to see her; Flandin wisely did not appear, and, with an amount of practical wisdom astonishing in an angry man, had impressed upon Madame the necessity of dealing cautiously.

"At least, Mathilde suspects nothing," he said. "Arthur is always very gentle and attentive. We must neither do anything to trouble her, nor must we be too hard on him: youth will be youth."

Madame felt it an added humiliation that she should be forced to submit to advice from the ex-stockbroker, though she acknowledged its wisdom, and tried to act upon it. But, in spite of her efforts, the interview was not a pleasant one; and when Arthur gave as a reason for not stopping to dine that he was engaged to dinner at Madame Pemberton's, the old lady's self-restraint failed entirely.

"You mean with that De Marsan woman," said she, flinging the hated name recklessly forward. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Arthur! I know everything that has been going on!"

"I congratulate you on your new correspondent," he replied. "Monsieur Flandin's letters must be very entertaining; he has a positive genius in the matter of original orthography."

"I have received no letters from him," Madame said; "he is not a man to complain: but, I warn you, there are limits you cannot pass with him; nor with Mathilde, weak as you pretend to consider her—poor, darling girl!"

"I trust your sympathy may console her under her supposed wrongs. What a model mother-in-law you will prove!" said he.

"Oh, Arthur, I never thought to live long enough to hear you speak to me like that!" cried Madame; and between anger and grief she burst into tears, which was the best thing she could have done, for her distress rendered him penitent.

Still his penitence did not strike sufficiently deep to make him give up his engagement, and his mother had to content herself with a careless pledge that he would be a better boy, and a promise to return to the hotel before bedtime.

But he did not come back. Honour was in her room when he arrived at her lodgings; he

had time to tell Effie what had happened, and Effie secretly vowed that old Madame should be punished by a failure on her son's part of keeping his word. Neither she nor Arthur recollected to tell Mrs. Pemberton of his mother's arrival; and Honour, having somehow imbibed the idea that Mathilde and her aunt had gone away to spend the night, was not surprised at his remaining the whole evening.

Arthur really meant to fulfil his promise, but he forgot it—an excuse that, probably, both to his parent and betrothed, would have been less pardonable than a deliberate forfeiture thereof. Several men strayed in after dinner, and Honour was occupied; Effie devoted herself to her friend, and, so far from remembering to go to the hotel, he forgot even to leave the house until everybody else had gone, and only then was brought to a realizing sense of the necessity of a departure by Effie's positive command.

Madame had told Monsieur Flandin he was coming back; and both had to disguise their wrath as best they might, on account of Mathilde. The foolish old aunt expressed some wonder that he did not appear, but Mathilde herself offered an excuse.

"If he has gone to a dinner-party, he probably could not get away," she said.

Madame de Chantal had explained that he was invited out, though she did not say where, nor did Mathilde ask.

The young lady announced that she was tired, and, when it was too late for any visitor, kissed each of the three elderly people, and bade them good-night in her usual subdued, decorous fashion. Her father and Madame took one gleam of comfort with them to their respective chambers: the little girl suspected nothing. In spite of his dissatisfaction with Arthur, Monsieur Flandin was as eager as the mother herself to avoid any trouble. Matters had proceeded too far for the engagement to be broken: not only would Mathilde suffer keenly, but a rupture must injure her in a social way, however brought about; and these considerations would have rendered him patient, independent of the selfish gratification he experienced in the idea of connecting his name with one of the oldest families in France. But neither his patience nor Madame de Chantal's ill-advised efforts at interference were of any avail; indeed, the latter undoubtedly helped to bring on the final catastrophe. She was speedily at open warfare

with Effie, and went to the length, when that lady called upon her, of sending down word she was "not at home to Madame de Marsan."

Then old Flandin presumed to utter remarks about her being at Trouville without her husband, and Effie heard of them. Into the bargain, Madame de Chantal's set of tabbies talked fearfully against her; and she almost thought Mathilde's manner had changed. Between her anger and her new interest in her flirtation—an interest which went beyond anything she had ever felt—Effie vowed vengeance. Not that she put the statement in this coarse way, or was even conscious of harbouring so wicked a determination; but she believed that she saw plainly this marriage could not be for Arthur's happiness. The more she studied the characters of the engaged pair, the plainer she perceived their unfitness for each other.

Soon after the signing of the contract, a lawsuit, dating back to the days of Madame's husband, had been decided in the De Chantals' favour, and the sum gained afforded Arthur an income which would render him independent of his mother—not a large sum, but enough, say, to live in Italy. And De Marsan meant to return to Italy in the autumn; he had told Effie so—was making arrangements to lease

their house for several years. The fact that she should no longer be obliged to reside in the neighbourhood removed that restraint which the danger of offending the magnates had placed upon her conduct. Since she was going away, it was a matter of indifference what they thought—and—and—she was doing no wrong ; if she were cruel to Arthur, she would only render him utterly desperate—his ruin would lie at her door ! If, as he said, each successive day his engagement and everything connected therewith, from Monsieur Flandin's vulgarity to Mathilde's shy ways, became more insupportable, then she could not find it in her conscience to urge him to further patience.

Effie had never been inclined to show any leniency to Léon because of the peculiar organization which makes an artist, nor had Léon ever desired it ; but she made great account of Arthur's poetical temperament and its needs—an opinion based on the fact of his having a certain talent for stringing together smooth-sounding rhymes, either in her praise or full of lugubrious lamentations over the cruelty of destiny and the worthlessness of existence, such as humanity at two-and-twenty is fond of indulging.

Honour Pemberton lived in the house with

Effie, yet she had no suspicion of what was going on. She spent her mornings out of doors, running races, upon her favourite horse, against her own weariness and misanthropy. It somehow happened that these were the very hours Arthur de Chantal was able to consecrate to Madame de Marsan; and as the room where she spent her forenoons was on the ground floor, with windows opening like doors upon the tiny lawn, he had taken a habit—probably out of consideration for the servants—of entering the house in that way, instead of ringing at the legitimate entrance.

Half the invitations to evening festivities Honour refused; gaiety was a bore at this time, and, except for the unkindness of leaving Effie alone, she would have seized her pilgrim-staff and sandal-shoon—the modern version for which I suppose would be countless big arks filled with luggage—and drifted away to the most secluded spot attainable, innocent of a human being who had ever seen her before, or would wish to see her again.

As for gossip, Honour was not a woman to whom people went with rumours and reports, especially in regard to any person known to rank among her list of friends.

The one regular visitor Honour had was the

elderly Flandin; but she was too much engrossed with her private causes of discontent to notice his assiduity, beyond an impatience thereof, and a vague wonder why he used her *salon* as a lounging-place for his idle hours. But Effie saw clearly what this perseverance portended, and confided the secret to Arthur, and the pair amused themselves hugely at the stockbroker's expense.

Aurora Somers was occupied with toothache this month. Pain appeared to have taken up permanent lodgings in her face, and, as she obstinately refused to part with a single molar, she spent the greater portion of the night groaning, and the day in sleeping off the effect of the narcotics she swallowed to dull her sufferings.

So there was nobody to warn Honour, and she never thought of Arthur de Chantal save as a handsome boy, rather given to posing for admiration; though, had she been on the alert, it is probable her interference would have had the same effect other people's did—worked harm.

Still Honour was unconsciously accessory to hurrying forward the *dénoûment*, by dealing a blow at Monsieur Flandin's vanity and heart. The elderly stockbroker, like so many cor-

pulent persons, had a romantic side to his nature where women were concerned. His first idea, when he proposed to himself a plan for winning the young widow, had been sensible and commonplace, as suited his years and size. He was rich, and so was she. Being a female, she needed a protector; he, when he lost his daughter, should require a feminine head to grace his castle, and his poor sister had no pretensions in that way. But deeper feelings had stolen in unawares. The old gentleman was sentimentally in love, and his moderation toward his future son-in-law's peccadilloes had been due to that fact rather than to patience.

The days were passing. So favourable an opportunity as he at present enjoyed of having Honour's society undisturbed would not offer again. Mayne might come back from England; Monsieur Pellerin might appear upon the scene; or De Vieuxville himself desert his post, and essay to recover those chances which rumour reported him to have lost.

One afternoon he presented himself in Madame Pemberton's *salon*, elegant in attire, though too damp about the forehead and too confused in mind to carry out his conceptions of that patrician ease wherewith, during these

later years, he had been laboriously striving to burnish what his titled neighbours would have termed the *bourgeois* coarseness of his manners.

Effie had gone out—Honour believed to sit awhile with little Mathilde. She was as near correct in her belief as mortals usually get. Effie was sitting with Mathilde's lover on the beach, far beyond the troublesome eyes of loungers and bathers and the limits to which the furthest wanderings of Flandin or old Madame could lead them.

The stockbroker appeared before the enslaver of his elderly heart, and proceeded to lay that treasure at her feet with so much circumlocution and so many stilted phrases that for some time (chancing to be in an absent mood) she had not the slightest idea what he was talking about, fancied it some ordinary topic, and uttered meaningless ejaculations at random whenever his pausing to catch breath reminded her that such show of attention was requisite. When she did gain a faint suspicion concerning his errand, she rashly concluded, from some mention of Aurora, that the worthy gentleman had actually come to ask her relative to share his name and wealth; and the idea tickled her so intensely, that—her nerves not being under good control

—she burst out laughing, and then was quite overcome with remorse at the enormity of her conduct.

The stockbroker stared at her, apoplectic with dismay. It occurred to her to put her handkerchief to her eyes. He might think her hysterical, and so forgive her gross breach of politeness. The ruse was successful in deluding him, but it produced an effect she had not anticipated.

She heard the sound of a heavy weight falling upon the floor, accompanied by strange rumblings which appeared to come from underground. She dropped her handkerchief and looked up, and, to her horror, saw old Flandin on his knees before her. The noise had been caused by this antiquely poetical business; the rumbling by some portion of his inward anatomy, which objected to his playing such tricks.

"Good gracious, Monsieur Flandin! what are you doing there?" she exclaimed, growing almost hysterical in earnest, between vexation at his folly and an impulse to laugh again at his absurd appearance. "I will inform my cousin; but I must tell you honestly that I do not think you stand the slightest chance."

"Ah, let no one come between us! Decide

for yourself, best, most amiable, most charming of women!" cried he. "I offer you my wealth, my heart, the devotion of my life."

Then Honour discovered that the preposterous old goose was actually offering love and marriage to her. She did not laugh, but she smiled, and that was rather worse. She was vexed, too, with his presumption, not being of the order of women who find a satisfaction in subjugating one of the opposite sex, no matter how old or ugly he may be.

"Since your flattering offer is intended for me, I must beg to decline it," she said, rising as she spoke. "Please to get up, Monsieur Flandin; and I trust the matter may go no further. If you will not say another word, I will do my best to forget it."

He struggled to his feet, and glared at her. He was in a passion now.

"Madame," said he, as soon as he could stop puffing sufficiently to speak, "I wish you good day."

"Good day, Monsieur Flandin," replied Honour. "I am sorry to be cross. Don't let us think any more about it."

But Flandin was not able to accept this olive-branch. His feelings were lacerated.

He believed now she *had* laughed; and his knees hurt him cruelly too.

"I shall think of it, Madame!" cried he; "and I shall always feel that I have been ill treated—led on—deceived! I—I—"

Honour retreated a few steps, vouchsafed him a haughtily wondering little stare, and repeated,—

"Good day, Monsieur Flandin."

Her look and manner penetrated even his armour of obtuseness; he walked straight out of the room without so much as a word, and met Effie de Marsan in the hall.

The instant she glanced at his face she knew what had happened as well as if she had been present at the interview. She was in a bad mood; she had heard from Arthur the things the Flandin set were saying of her; on her way home had met some Parisian dames with whom she wished to stand well, and their cold greetings proved that her enemies were pushing her to the wall.

She could avenge herself on the stockbroker at least, and in a way that his egregious vanity would feel deeply.

"Poor Monsieur Flandin!" said she. "You ought to have put it off till cooler weather: you look as if you had had a *coup de soleil*."

He could not speak; a faint gurgle in his fat throat was the only expression he could find for his wrath.

"Good day, Monsieur Flandin," cried Effie, unconsciously stinging him by a repetition of Honour's very words. "I shall give Madame Pemberton a good scolding for her cruelty, and I will tell everybody that I think she might have done worse than accept you. Good day! Take care of the sun! I'll explain to Madame de Chantal and little Mathilde so that they may not teaze you. Good day."

He hurried off; she swept him a low curtsy; her mocking laughter pursued him to the gates, and he went nearly mad to remember that she was sure to keep her word.

CHAPTER VI.

HOW IT WORKED.

Monsieur Flandin's first impulse was to rush away from Trouville, but a little reflection showed him that by so doing he might fatally endanger his daughter's happiness. The elderly fat man had his good side; he could think of Mathilde even in the height of his anger and pain. Their presence would be a certain restraint upon Arthur; and he was sure that the young man would remain even if they did go, and he must not be left alone to Madame de Marsan's malign influence.

Mathilde apparently still remained blind to what was passing—deaf to the wind of gossip that was blowing so freely about other people's ears. No matter if Arthur neglected her, when he did come she greeted him with unvarying sweetness—accepted his excuses—and forced her father and old Madame to be silent by the very composure which irritated both, thankful as they were that she had no suspicion.

She was looking rather pale and thin, but the heat of the weather accounted for that when they noticed the change, which was but seldom, for, like people in general, they were blind to the alterations in the appearance of a person whom they saw daily, because the change was so gradual.

But the overthrow of Monsieur Flandin's ambitious hopes in regard to Honour Pemberton, and the consciousness that his secret was in Madame de Marsan's hands, caused profound and unceasing irritation, which showed itself upon the slightest opportunity.

Hitherto he and Madame de Chantal had remained friends, and his practical good sense had frequently restrained her when interference with her son would only have made matters worse. But he could no longer exercise this self-control; he grew more pompous and arbitrary; he boldly differed with her when she announced opinions, spoke slightingly of nobility and its rights, causing her, first astonishment at his audacity, then a haughty anger which made her feel the relations between them as galling as did Arthur himself. His last shred of patience with the young man's insanity gave way; he said such things to Madame of her son, and uttered such threats, that the old

lady was forced into defending Arthur, and almost ready sometimes to tell the stockbroker that he might tear the marriage-contract and be done.

It was all very hard on the poor lady, and in the solitude of her chamber she used to weep the hot, difficult tears of age, and think that she would be glad to throw up the weary business called existence, and lay her humiliated head quietly in the grave.

She found very few opportunities to expostulate with her son; he managed to avoid her and Monsieur Flandin, except in Mathilde's presence, which he knew would preserve him from open attacks on the part of either of their parents; and still Mathilde received him with unvarying sweetness, and still she defended him when in his absence he was blamed for his lack of punctuality or disregard of his engagements.

But little Mathilde had not been so blind as they believed, nor, moderate as her mental gifts might be, was she so weak and yielding as everybody about her supposed. She loved Arthur with the romantic affection of early youth, but it was real love, and wrought its natural consequence—it transformed her from a child into a woman. She was not jealous by

nature: her faith in her betrothed had been entire. Then, too, her sudden friendship for Madame de Marsan, born out of that lady's kindness and apparent interest, was a real, deep feeling likewise.

How or when suspicions first crept into her mind she could not have told, but once roused they grew rapidly. Even her father, who considered her the epitome of all the virtues of girlhood, would not have given her credit for the self-control she displayed. She acted upon a distinct rule: she tried for awhile to believe that her suffering rose from unworthy jealousy; neither Arthur nor any other should know of her trouble, and it would pass—she was sure it would pass.

But for the last ten days she had ceased to hope this. She told herself that once convinced, though her heart might break, she would send the man from her. Poor little soul! she was neither grand nor stately in her self-communings, —one might have smiled at the odd medley of thoughts and sensations,—but she clung to her resolution, and only three days after Monsieur Flandin's unfortunate interview with Honour Pemberton she was forced to act upon it.

She heard with her own ears Arthur's complaints to Effie de Marsan; she knew that he

did not love her—that the engagement was in his eyes a mere commercial bargain, against which his whole soul revolted; she heard him declare that he would work, starve willingly, do anything to get back his freedom.

This happened during a ball at the *cercle*. Mathilde had not meant to listen—would have escaped, had it been possible, every word hurt her so cruelly. But she was sitting where she could not stir without attracting their attention; and though she would have liked to call him and speak, she could not trust herself just then.

The next morning she entered the *salon* where her father and old Madame were sitting. She interrupted a quarrel—their heated, angry faces would have shown this, but she was in the room before they were aware, and caught a bitter speech Monsieur Flandin uttered in regard to Arthur's infatuation for Effie de Marsan, his base, unworthy conduct toward Mathilde herself—a speech so galling, that Madame could not control her temper, and kept interrupting him, both saying things which they hardly meant, till at last Madame told Flandin that his daughter was a mere baby, and that it was her own fault she could not keep Arthur's youthful fancy from wandering.

Then they perceived Mathilde standing before them, and sat in dumb, open-mouthed confusion. She stood there very pale, but composed. Perhaps what struck them most, in the whirl of confused feelings that paralyzed their energies for some moments, was the womanly determination which filled her face.

"I came here to speak to you both," she began; "and your conversation shows me that you will not be surprised at what I have to say. Papa, do not be angry with me; I cannot marry Monsieur de Chantal."

Old Madame groaned aloud. The final catastrophe had come with a vengeance, and from an unexpected quarter. She had never dreamed that Mathilde would find courage to utter words like these; her fear had been that Monsieur Flandin might reach such a pitch of exasperation that he would break off the match.

Then she and the father cried out together in horror and dismay: but Mathilde stood silent, in this new courage which nerved her; she was trembling a little, but showed no fear.

Old Madame recovered her feminine wits, and tried to remedy the disaster.

"My dear child," she began, "your father

and I were both cross this morning; you must not mind what we said: neither of us meant it; he will tell you so himself."

"No, no; indeed we did not!" Monsieur Flandin added, as fully alive as Madame to the necessity of calming Mathilde.

"It is not what you said," returned the girl; "I was coming here to say what I did. Papa, there must be an end to my — my engagement."

"You don't know what you are saying!" cried her father.

"You forget yourself, my child!" observed old Madame; "you ought not to speak like that to your papa."

"Certainly not, Mathilde. I am surprised at you!" chimed in Monsieur Flandin, trying to look stern and parental. He seized eagerly upon Madame's idea of reducing her to obedience; but both felt the change which had come over the girl, and were so alarmed by it, that, had an unexcited spectator been present, he must have smiled at the ludicrous failure Flandin made in his efforts to clutch at his usual pompous dignity, and Madame's failure in trying to assume her stately composure.

"I do not mean to be disrespectful," Mathilde answered, trembling still more, though neither

face nor voice lost this new, strange firmness, which astonished the pair before her as much as if a lamb had suddenly turned to defend itself when attacked. "Papa, you must hear me! Madame, you must listen! I will never, never, marry Arthur de Chantal!"

They expostulated, they scolded, they pleaded with her. Monsieur Flandin wrung his hands, and old Madame wept; but, though frightened at her own boldness, Mathilde stood her ground. Neither prayers nor exhortations moved her. They told her that breaking the engagement would injure her reputation.

"Better that than to have my heart broken," she replied. "Oh, I am not a child any longer! If I am old enough to be a wife, I am old enough to think and to feel! I tell you this marriage would make me utterly wretched—I should die!"

Where had she learned such arguments? where found this new resolution? They looked at her in wonder; at each other in dismay.

"Papa, papa, do not condemn me to such misery!" she cried. "I am your only child; don't break my heart!"

They tried to make her and themselves believe this resolve arose from girlish pique, which would pass. Madame bade the father

exert his authority, and he tried anew, but so weakly that he felt his own impotency as keenly as the old lady herself did.

"Send me to a convent—let me go to the one in Alsace, where my cousin is the Superior," Mathilde said. "Papa, I will never marry him!"

Arthur came in while she was speaking, utterly unprepared for a scene like this. He had come, meaning to be especially amiable, as amends for his culpable negligence of the last few days. His mother and Monsieur Flandin assailed him simultaneously, and roused him to such anger that his good resolutions flew away.

Mathilde interrupted the angry discussion.

"Monsieur," she said, turning to the Vicomte, "I give you back the liberty you regret so deeply: you are free."

He stood speechless under a rush of varying emotions. He was glad to have his freedom; dismayed by this overthrow of his worldly hopes; and, like his mother, enraged that existence should have brought him to a pass where this little *bourgeoise* could humiliate him by a rejection of his hand. To think of breaking loose himself, was one thing; but to be refused, coolly sent about his business

by the daughter of a *roturier!* Then, too, he could not help remembering her millions; more than that, she appeared under a new aspect. She looked positively pretty in her pallid dignity; even that pinkness about the eyelids, which had vexed his critical taste, was gone. She seemed positively to have grown several inches since he saw her last, and he was sensitive enough, manly enough, to feel humiliated under the scorn which filled her eyes. He knew that she had heard the words he spoke to Madame de Marsan on the previous night. He realized for the first time how contemptible a part he had played. The scorn in Mathilde's steady gaze—she who had scarcely ever before been able to meet his glance without shy blushes—was a light whereby his soul suddenly beheld the meanness of his conduct.

Old Madame was speaking.

"He does not regret his freedom!" she cried. "Arthur, tell her that you do not—it is only a misunderstanding—"

"That is it," interrupted Flandin, catching at the lucky word—"a misunderstanding."

"Do not ask Monsieur to contradict himself," said Mathilde, before the young man could find any words.

"Let us say no more at present," cried

Madame, feeling a thoroughly feminine anger at the utter helplessness of the two men. "Come with me, my dearest Mathilde: you have taken Arthur by surprise; he does not know what to say."

"There is nothing to be said," returned Mathilde. "I have told Monsieur that he is free—I mean it."

Flandin groaned.

"Arthur, Arthur!" pleaded his mother.

The young man did what anybody else would have done—took refuge in anger and a general sense of injury.

"I should be at a loss how to combat Mademoiselle's very emphatic resolve," said he.

Mathilde turned her back on him.

"Papa, I am going to my room," she said. "Everybody must understand—the matter is settled—"

"My dearest child!" broke in Madame, finding that neither man could articulate, and still wildly hoping the breach might be healed, "Arthur may have annoyed you; but young men will be careless, especially young men in his position! I must speak! I am not defending him; he must plead his own cause! But few young noblemen—"

Not finding language exactly suited to that

presence wherewith to end her phrase, she rendered what she had said as emphatic as possible by sundry nods and sighs.

"Madame," said Mathilde, when she found that the old lady did not mean to continue, "I do not pretend to know what young noblemen may do! I am one of the people. Not having family traditions to cling to, I prize truth and honesty."

She left the room, without another word.

Then there ensued indeed a battle royal. Sometimes it was Arthur against the parents; sometimes mother and son against Flandin; sometimes Madame against the two men. At last Arthur declared that he would never seek to change Mademoiselle Flandin's resolution; that he was glad to have the matter ended. His mother could call down her threatened curse upon his head as soon as she pleased; Monsieur Flandin could send a friend to his lodgings at his convenience. He had done nothing—absolutely nothing! Because he was not ready to sit all day and help wind worsted, Mademoiselle Flandin had broken their engagement! Mademoiselle might have her way—it was all ended.

Then he flung out of the *salon*, and left the elderly pair staring helplessly at each other in

dreary confusion. After a while they put by wrath, mutual recriminations, all disturbing elements, which could only help utterly to wreck any faint hope that might yet be left, and united their forces to find some means of averting the catastrophe.

When she had gained sufficient composure, Madame went herself in search of Mathilde. Her womanly arts might be able to soothe the girl's wounded pride, as no masculine adroitness could do. But she retreated, signally baffled; feeling almost as if she had a stranger to deal with, Mathilde was so unlike the timid, yielding creature she had known.

Then Monsieur Flandin tried his powers; but the result of that was a complete overthrow for Madame. What passed in the interview she did not know; but before dinner she received a ceremoniously worded note from the ex-stockbroker, in which he informed her that the engagement must be considered at an end.

She did not see either father or daughter again that evening. She sent for Arthur, but he paid no attention to her message. Old Madame had thought she knew what trouble was; but as she sat alone this dreary night, it seemed to her that she had never dreamed

what utterly hopeless desolation was until now.

The next day Monsieur Flandin and his daughter left Trouville, with scant farewells for Madame; and she learned, by a wondering note from a friend, that the stockbroker had already taken the initiative in announcing the rupture, determined at least that his daughter should have right on her side, so far as explanations of her reasons for breaking the engagement could afford it.

Then Madame set about her preparations for returning home. All she could do was to hide her diminished old head within the seclusion of her gloomy château. She succeeded in seeing Arthur, but he absolutely refused to accompany her, and there was a definite breach between the mother and son.

Of course Trouville rang with the news, and everybody blamed Madame de Marsan as the cause of the trouble. The revelations came suddenly upon Honour Pemberton, and, unfortunately, she could not doubt, for she had just been roused to a knowledge that she was deceived in Effie—had been forced to see that she was flirting outrageously with Arthur de Chantal, and that the young man was wildly in love. Then, too, she discovered that Effie

had betrayed poor old Flandin's secret, and exposed him to ridicule by detailing the scene she had witnessed.

Another disappointment for Honour! She asked herself wearily if there was no such thing as truth in the world. Her eyes once opened, the state of affairs between Effie and her husband assumed an entirely different aspect. She understood Léon now; she knew what had rendered him the morbid, suspicious man, against whom the wife had so artfully pleaded in her own favour.

It was not possible for Honour to keep silence; to do that would be tacitly countenancing Effie. The wily lady attempted a little self-justification, and brought down upon her own head one of the scathing rebukes which Mrs. Pemberton could utter so forcibly, when her frank, honest nature was outraged by deception and treachery on the part of a person whom she had trusted.

Effie took refuge in wounded feeling; but her genius in that line was thrown away. Once put on her guard, Honour was not easy to deceive; she had a happy faculty of remaining blind to the faults of one she loved till convinced they were wilful, deliberate errors, then she became a rather harsh censor.

"You misjudge me," said Effie, "but I shall not quarrel."

"I should be glad to think I did," returned Honour; "but you know, and so do I, that every word I have spoken is the truth."

"Do you know what surprises me most in the matter?" observed Effie, meditatively. "It is that I should have allowed you to speak to me as you have: nobody ever ventured upon such a liberty before. I must be very fond of you not even to be angry."

"And I should be a poor friend if I did not tell you the truth," cried Honour. "I cannot put the matter aside, by saying it is none of my business: it is my business, since I profess to love you! Effie de Marsan, you are ruining every possibility of happiness or peace in your life."

"It has been done for me," sighed Effie.

"I have heard all that; and I used to believe it, but I don't any longer," retorted Honour, hotly. "You are a flirt—perhaps by nature—then so much the more shame to you not to control the propensity."

"I suppose I am," Effie said, rather complacently. "I do like to please people, and I cannot help being glad when I succeed—

that is what Léon, and it seems you too, call flirting!"

"We had better stop," returned Honour; "if I talk, I must tell you what is in my mind, and I have said all that I have any right to say."

"I don't think I should be vexed; I should only fancy I was listening to Léon," said Effie, with another sigh.

"And what are you to say to him, when he finds that you have exposed yourself to gossip in this way?"

"Misjudge me, I suppose, as you do," replied Effie, deprecatingly. "Is that the reason you begin to lecture?—you think you can because that malicious old woman has set people talking about me."

"She could not have done so unless your conduct had given her the opportunity," cried Honour. "Oh, Effie, stop where you are! I have seen enough, and heard enough, to know that the path you are walking is a wrong one,—yes, I shall tell you the truth—a degrading one."

"I think I have lived a little too long," said Effie, with a sad smile, "since I have lived to hear such a word applied to my conduct by the woman I love best in the world."

"I did not say conduct—I believe I was pleading for you with myself," replied Honour. "Well, this may be the last time we shall ever sit like this—that you will ever submit to be spoken to so plainly."

"Do you mean to give me up, Honour?"

"I don't know! I think I do unless you stop short."

"Because old Madame de Chantal and her tabbies are talking about me?"

"You can't look me in the face and accuse me of such cowardice!" cried Honour. "But I will say good-bye to my friendship for you if—"

"Go on; you need not hesitate! From first to last you have been very impertinent, but I don't seem to mind that! All I care about is your misjudging me so cruelly."

"It is useless," groaned Honour; "as long as you wilfully deceive yourself, there is no hope!"

"Past hope—past help!" sighed Effie. "A dreary era in a woman's life—eh, Honour? But I know what brought me to it."

"So do I," retorted her friend, significantly.

"Suspicion," murmured Effie, "cruel, wicked suspicion! And now you are imitating Léon!

Well, God forgive you both!—I think I do."

"I might as well argue with a blind person about shades of colour!" cried Honour.

"The doubt in my mind would be—which of us is blind," smiled Effie. She rose as she spoke.

"Where are you going?" Honour asked.

"I promised to walk with Monsieur de Chantal—I mean to keep my word. It is a duty I owe myself to show that your suspicions cannot move me, because they are without foundation."

"Effie," said Honour, "you know that boy loves you—or what he calls love—the young idiot! You are a married woman—do you think you are doing right?"

"Perfectly right," Effie answered. "His mother, and old Flandin, and that silly girl have, between them, driven Arthur nearly mad; I shall not give the *coup de grâce* by suddenly turning severely virtuous."

"Will you tell me you are not more interested in him than you ought to be?"

"No," said Effie, candidly; "for I think I am; but that is the fault of Léon and all the rest of you. I shall not make him suffer on

that account, nor risk rendering him utterly desperate."

"I suppose your husband's being driven desperate does not weigh?"

"Certainly not; because he ought to know me too well to suspect me."

"Suspect you of what? Come, let us put it into coarse language! If you go on, the world will say Arthur de Chantal is your lover."

"That will be because they judge from the evil in their own minds: it cannot affect me."

"And I say," cried Honour, "that when a woman behaves so that the thing can be said, she is as wicked as if she had a lover. More than that: I believe I could forgive the crowning sin, if she really loved the man, easier than this paltering with her reputation and her soul—calling herself innocent because—because—Oh, Effie, Effie! it is a shame even to think of such things!"

"Ah," said Effie, with an irritating ring of triumph in her voice, "there is the difference between me and—most people! I don't think of such things."

Honour coloured scarlet with indignation at the injustice of the charge; then, in spite of her anger and pain, laughed outright at Effie's skill in fencing, all the while thinking, with a

dolorous pang, what trouble this very ability to keep herself right in her own esteem portended for the woman.

"It is useless to talk more," Honour said; "I have told you my opinion."

"Yes, and for your own sake I wish you had not," Effie replied, sweetly.

"I shall go to Paris to-morrow—will you come with me?" asked Honour, while Effie was arranging some papers on the table.

"Certainly not," she answered. "Léon would be offended."

"I know he would not! But I see you do not mean to go. Well—you will go home? You cannot stop here alone."

"The place is not so pleasant to me that I should wish to stay," returned Effie, evasively.

And Honour did go the next morning; Mrs. Somers, of course, accompanying her. For the present, it was best she and Effie should be separated, and she believed that Effie would return home at once.

But Madame de Marsan stayed ten days still in the lodgings, and Arthur de Chantal visited her constantly,—stopping each evening much later than he ought, and all Trouville knew it.

So the whole story—the broken engagement

—Effie's share therein—the verdict in regard to her—reached Mademoiselle de Hauteville in her Brittany retreat, through a letter from one of the tabbies. Mademoiselle had extensive ideas in regard to her duties and rights. She proceeded without delay "to put her finger in the pie," and, being in a great rage, was not choice as to her way of doing it. She knew De Marsan's address in the island of Jersey, and this was the epistle she wrote to him:—

"Your wife is a fiend, and you are a fool; if you do not know both facts, you stand alone in your ignorance. She has broken off the engagement between Arthur de Chantal and Flandin's daughter. The best thing you can do is to go in search of her, and force her to behave decently; failing that, to break her neck, for her sake and your own.

"I loved your mother. You belong to a good old family. Little more than a century ago one of my race married an ancestress of yours, so I have a right to advise you. Whether I had a right or not, I should do it, as you know of old; for, come what may, I am always,

"DÉSIRÉE HONORÉE DE HAUTEVILLE."

Of course the effect of this judicious epistle

was to cause Léon to remain about a fortnight longer than he intended: the world should not be able to say he doubted his wife, and hurried back to watch her. So he stayed in picturesque Sark, where Mademoiselle's letter found him, and went mad with pain and jealousy, though the pain was the stronger feeling. He put Mademoiselle's letter in a clean envelope, and sent it back with the compliments of Monsieur de Marsan. He returned the epistle, because, though valueless to him, it might, in the opinion of the writer, be sufficiently important to make her desirous of preserving it among the archives of the house De Hauteville.

He wrote to his wife, telling her simply what had happened—not a line more. At first Effie laughed at the lesson he had given the impertinent old woman, then grew sentimental over her husband's coldness, admired herself for not going to destruction when everybody was trying to send her, and returned with increased disinterestedness to the task of solacing young Arthur's woes.

CHAPTER VII.

THE WOMAN OF BUSINESS.

It was the end of September before Honour Pemberton returned to her château. She no longer called it home, as she had done during those early weeks of her residence, when everything about it was so pleasant to her, and she so enthusiastic in regard to the new life and fresh interests which she believed herself to have found. She had fully determined not to spend the winter in Normandy.

Go back she must, in order to make a supervision of her schools and other philanthropic projects—how she hated the words!—before deserting the place and her protégés for an indefinite period. She had another and a very disagreeable duty to fulfil—that of inquiring into the state of affairs at the sugar factory. This would involve consultations with Monsieur de Vieuxville, and the bare idea was abhorrent. But she was wrong to leave an important business so completely in the hands of any person. Her lawyer-friend, Monsieur Besselére,

told her this, with his usual savage frankness, during one of their interviews while she was in Paris, when some questions he asked forced her to admit her entire ignorance as to what her manager was doing, and whether money was being lost or won.

She must return, but she would remain no longer than was absolutely necessary; after that, she would drift down to her beloved Italy again, and try, beneath the soothing influence of the Roman skies, to forget every incident connected with that brief episode of dreams and enthusiasm which had grown the bitterest memory of her life. She vowed that at least she would not be annoyed by rejoicings; so she took care to arrive by the late evening train, greatly to Aurora's discomfort. Causing her cousin annoyance gave Honour a new pang of remorse—she was always teasing somebody. She certainly was the most selfish monster on the face of the earth! But she succeeded in her wish to get safe into her castle untroubled by congratulations, and found afterward that she had terribly disappointed all the children and workpeople. They had been making extensive preparations to receive her. Green arches were to be erected, flowers strewn in her path, speeches delivered, unlimited buns

eaten, and numberless quarts of cider drunk; and she had deprived her subordinates of this pleasure merely to gratify her own morbid, misanthropic feelings, and so had to feel more wicked than ever. All the persons of her acquaintance were back, and she received as cordial welcomes as ever; but the neighbourhood was not in the friendly, united state which had seemed its normal condition when she formed acquaintance with its coteries. An internecine war raged, all the more fierce because it was conducted on the plan of ambushes and surprises, instead of a regular open battle.

Madame de Chantal and her friends were fighting Effie de Marsan, and meant that she should be completely ostracized. Poor old Madame, too, had a heavy grief to bear: no renewal of the broken engagement had been possible, and, worse than that, she and her son were entirely estranged. Mademoiselle Désirée Honorée de Hauteville had even employed her notable powers to arrange both difficulties, had lectured Mathilde, penetrated to the privacy of Monsieur Flandin's bed-chamber as he lay groaning beneath the mingled pain of gout and disappointment, journeyed up to Paris, where report said Arthur was consoling himself

by every species of dissipation; but in each case the resolute spinster met with utter failure. Mathilde would not listen; old Flandin was sulkily obstinate; and as for Arthur, that wicked boy turned upon her like a dissolute fiend (Mademoiselle's own expression), and told her plainly that his mother might thank herself and her tabbies for everything which had happened! Yes, indeed, and ranked the châtelaine of the Hauteville castle among the band of devoted friends to whom he applied this coarse epithet.

The spinster was forced to bear her defeat as best she might, though I fear her poor little brother suffered terribly. She grew so gloomy and despondent under the varied proofs of human depravity brought to her notice that she became convinced the end of the world must be near at hand, and, as a preparation therefor, instituted penances and fastings, in which she forced Monsieur and the whole household to join, rendering existence such a burthen to them by this course of untimely Lenten observances and the metaphorical flagellations of her tongue, that they were ready to wish the general destruction she prophesied would come and be done with it.

De Marsan was back—a sort of armed truce

existing between himself and his wife. Before he returned he essayed once more to change the course of their lives. He wrote her a long, kind letter, agreeing, on his side, to bury in oblivion all that had occurred during the summer—asking her to forgive whatever had been wrong on his part—telling her that they would go away, spend the winter in Greece or the East, and try everything in their power to render existence peaceful and pleasurable.

Effie did not reply to this epistle; when he reached home, she received him with the airs of an injured woman who was trying to bear her burdens in silence, and would trouble him by no reproaches save those shown in her sad eyes and weary resignation.

But his natural impatience, increased by mental suffering and the physical pain he had been enduring without intermission for weeks, would not permit him to let her continue this course unnoticed.

He thought that perhaps she had not received his letter—she could not have done so! He went in search of her, before he had been a day at home, to ask—to try again.

His letter? Oh yes, she had received it.

"Well?" he inquired.

"I think I was amused—I did not know

anything *could* amuse me—at your trying to make yourself and me believe that you loved me," said she. "Loved *me!*" and she laughed.

"Effie, Effie!" he pleaded.

"As for your condescension in offering to overlook my faults," she went on, stone deaf to the entreaty of his voice, to the passionate yearning in his glance, "that was a bit of insolence which I think few men besides you could have committed. I have nothing with which to reproach myself in my conduct."

"Though you know that your name is in every mouth—that people stand aloof from us," he interrupted, the eager light in his eyes giving place to angry gleams.

"All your fault," she said. "You have rendered us both ridiculous by your jealousy! Had you not set the example, no human being would have dared to blame me."

"You know that I have never opened my lips; you know that your flirtation with De Chantal has been so patent, and gone to such lengths, that—"

"Whatever I have done is your fault," she broke in. "You need not lecture—you need not try violence—I am not afraid of you."

"Will you go away—will you come beyond the reach of these troubles?"

"Not at present," she replied. "These idiotic old women, whom your vile conduct has set upon me, shall not say they have driven me out of the field."

"I can let the house," he said. "Do let us go."

"I tell you I will not! Monsieur de Marsan, you can neither frighten nor drive me. If you are ashamed to show your face among these people of whom you have made yourself the laughing-stock, you can go. I shall not stir! You can't force me! I tell you I am not afraid! If you let the house over my head, I would sit out in a field before I would allow you to treat me like a slave."

Of course there was a quarrel—Léon gained nothing else by his effort at a reconciliation. Effie did not admit it to herself, but the truth was she meant to force him to spend the autumn in Paris, because some affairs connected with the investment of the funds gained by the law-suit would oblige De Chantal to remain there.

After this, De Marsan left her alone. There was no way of combating her passive obstinacy. He could not pick her up in his arms and carry her off to the railway train; he could not let the house over her head without causing a scandal from which he shrank, for she would literally

have put her threat into execution. He left her alone. They met at dinner; dined in silence; he lived in his studio, even managed to work, though the unfinished picture he had begun in the spring had been removed from the easel, and stood with its face to the wall.

The neighbourhood knew that Arthur de Chantal came down once from Paris, and visited Effie, and returned to town without going near his mother; it knew, too, that the visit took place on a day when her husband was absent.

So far as the De Hautevilles and the little group of *ancienne noblesse* were concerned, Léon took the initiative in the matter of the "cut direct." As for Monsieur Flandin, as soon as that gentleman had recovered from his attack of gout, De Marsan went in search of him, and told him quietly that if he ventured again to connect his wife's name with the rupture of the engagement, he, the stockbroker, should receive a horsewhipping such as never man endured.

The other families—and several new ones had moved into the neighbourhood, gay, rich people—were friendly enough with the De Marsans; and Léon burthened his conscience by declaring that if any member of his household had had to do with the Flandin-Chantal trouble, it was himself—he had never approved of the

alliance. Madame had come in the beginning to beg their assistance; he had forbidden his wife's moving in the matter. Arthur was a mere boy, and his friend—the mother—an ancient fossil, who would probably ruin the young man by her obstinacy, her antiquated ideas, and her foolishness generally.

So when Honour arrived she found the neighbourhood in a sadly divided state. The relics of feudal times kept themselves a good deal shut up in their castles, and though other people pretended not to care, this seclusion on the part of the magnates put a damper upon gaieties.

Probably to prove her angelic powers of forgiveness, Effie was among the first visitors Mrs. Pemberton received. The visit was returned, and they appeared on sufficiently cordial terms; but Léon perceived the difference, and it hurt him cruelly, for he knew Honour well enough to be certain that nothing but finding out for herself she had been deceived in Effie could have chilled her friendship.

As for him, Mrs. Pemberton was alarmed by the change she saw each time they met. He was like a man consumed by inward fever. She began to have a dread that, if his physical

strength did not break down under the combined effects of illness and mental pain, his mind would fail beneath the strain of suffering and hard work—for he toiled unceasingly. But Effie remained stone blind. Honour spoke to her once, and obtained for reply,—

"I have no influence. People tell me he visits you constantly. It would be good-natured of you to persuade him to be more careful."

Of course this insulting speech silenced Honour, and widened the breach between her and Effie. Honour pitied them both, and wished anxiously that Mayne would return. He was warmly attached to De Marsan, and had more influence over the wife than anybody else. He might be able to do some good if he were only there; and Honour trembled under a vague presentiment of coming disaster. She actually decided to write to him,—of course meaning only to say how greatly she and Effie were troubled about De Marsan's health,—but Effie did not know where he was. She had received no letters for weeks. He was going into Wales when she last heard. She had expected him back before this; had even written to her grandfather's widow to

inquire if he were ill, but that venerable dame had not condescended to reply.

"I fancied you had been too much occupied lately to bestow a thought on my dear old Gerard," Effie added, with a covert sneer, which aroused Honour's indignation. She knew perfectly well what the words meant. Effie wished to insinuate that there was a flirtation between her former friend and her husband. She was trying to make other people believe the thing. This fact came also to Honour. It was Monsieur Pellerin who told her, and he really did it out of kindness. He and Honour were as good friends as ever. He had seen her several times in Paris, and visited her frequently since. He showed her the nicest side of his character, and his unobtrusive efforts to be useful, his politeness and intelligence, inclined her to like him. She was so much alone now, where real friends were concerned, that she appreciated his interest.

She had been ten days at the château, but had not yet summoned resolution to attack her duty of examining into matters at the factory. Though she was often at the schools and in the workmen's houses, a whole week passed before she even saw Monsieur de Vieuxville.

She chanced to encounter him in the village which bore his name. There were mutual acquaintances about,—the early autumn fair being in progress,—so, of course, recognition was necessary. Honour addressed him as she might have done had they met only a few hours before. He accepted the position readily, and there was nothing to betray the fact that nearly two months had elapsed since the lady and the manager of her business had stood face to face, or exchanged written communications.

The gossip in regard to him and Gracieuse Galais, so far from dying out, was daily assuming a more tangible shape. The common people possessed eyes and tongues as well as their betters, and kept a close watch during the absence of the great personages; and their reports filtered through servants up to masters, and helped to swell the list of scandalous chronicles which this autumn were so rife in the usually orderly, good-natured neighbourhood.

But Monsieur de Vieuxville appeared magnificently unconscious that his proceedings were remarked, and he had grown so much more reserved of late that no friend ventured to enlighten him, and no jester was

bold enough to indulge in those hints and jokes wherewith men among themselves are wont to compliment one of their sex on a supposed *bonne fortune.*

Honour went frequently to see Monsieur Galais. She thought him looking really better, and he was in excellent spirits. Doctor Jean had promised another visit before many weeks, and the good old man felt confident that his second errand would be crowned with success.

"The dear child misses him so," he said, with a triumphant laugh. "She cannot hide it. She is in a flutter each time I mention his name. I have not told her he is coming; I mean her to be taken by surprise. I think that will settle the business at once."

He rubbed his hands, and was so happy over his little plot, that Honour could not keep from encouraging him by seeming to share his hopes, though she knew how fallacious they were.

She saw Gracieuse sometimes, but never alone; and the girl avoided her in every possible way. Honour wrote her a letter at last, but it was returned unopened; and though Gracieuse was courteous when she encountered her former employer, she assumed

a depth of humility—a manner implying a sense of the gulf between a poor girl like her and the great lady—which was such a mockery, that Honour must have been offended had not her profound sympathy for the motherless creature rendered anger impossible.

So, in all ways, the place grew daily more odious to Mrs. Pemberton, and she longed to flee. Perhaps the hardest trial was the finding that neither wrath nor scorn, neither the proofs of his unworthiness nor her outraged pride and contempt of her own weakness, were strong enough to prevent her missing the companionship of the man who had possessed the power for a season so strongly to influence her life. Yet not he—only the ideal she had reared and called by his name. It could not be her foolish dream had gone so deep that its shadow must endure! She could not be sufficiently weak for such possibility!

It was not thwarted love which caused her heart to ache: it was the being forced to withdraw her esteem, to lose the friend she had trusted. She failed to recover from the disappointment because she was where so many things constantly reminded her of it. Once away, off in Italy, she should be able to forget that Armand de Vieuxville existed.

But first she must submit to hold communication with him—sit by his side in the counting-house — go over the books — listen to explanations. This task grew daily harder to contemplate, and she upbraided herself for not having done so immediately after her return. Sometimes she felt inclined to write a business-like demand for a written statement, but she knew this would not suffice. She had three minds to persuade Monsieur Besselère to come down and attend to the affair—indeed, she went so far as to hint such a request in a letter to him, but he answered her very curtly, that as she had in the beginning taken a personal supervision of her business she must continue to do so; sending any third person, especially a legal man, to examine the books would be an insult to Monsieur de Vieuxville—an implied doubt upon his honesty. As she had every reason to believe him faithful and conscientious in the discharge of his duties, she had no right to offer such humiliation on no better grounds than (his friend Madame Pemberton must excuse him; she knew of old that, if he spoke at all, he must speak plainly) those afforded by some womanish dislike to her manager, because rumour—usually a liar, and no doubt one in this case—averred that in his

private life the gentleman was not so unflinchingly straightforward as he showed in all business relations.

Honour was angry enough at having drawn such a reproof upon her head, though she recognized its justice. It spoke well for her character that, after pouting awhile, she was able to write to her stern Mentor,—

"I was horribly vexed at your letter, and am still. At first my rage was directed toward you, for scolding me; now it is spent on myself, for having been mean enough to ask you to help me do an ungenerous thing. I thank you for the lesson—at least I will try to some time when I succeed in growing wise and humble, and I think you are the best and most disagreeable person ever a silly woman had to deal with."

And when the lawyer read this confession, he said to himself,—

"By Jupiter and Venus, and all the rest of the clan, that is a woman in a million! She would be intolerable on account of her big brain, only her heart is so much bigger that it masters her head!"

But the days sped on, and though her desire to be gone grew always stronger, and each night when she went to bed Honour vowed

that the next morning she would plunge into her task, the duty remained unfulfilled, and she not free to depart.

There was another reason for her staying—one which she loathed herself for believing necessary, but which she could not put aside.

If there was truth in rumour, the time was coming when Gracieuse Galais would need a friend. Honour could not go until she had succeeded in convincing the girl that, whatever happened, she should find such in her.

The evil report—this culmination of the gossip—could have no foundation; she would not believe it! But her fear was that the story might in some way reach the old father, and prove his death-blow, and Gracieuse, utterly desperate, require the support of a strong hand. But, however black the strait, would she trust Honour? That was the question! The girl's aversion must spring from jealousy. Honour knew her sex well enough to be forced to admit that no other feeling could have rendered Gracieuse so bitter in her dislike and so implacable, so obstinate in her refusal to be reconciled, so stubborn in her determination to put no faith in her former friend's truth.

Honour had exhausted every possible effort

—what more could she do? Still she knew that her conscience would never give her a moment's peace, were some trouble to arise during her absence a way out of which might have been offered to Gracieuse had she herself proved patient enough to wait for means or opportunity of showing the girl that she had always one person willing and ready to aid.

Jean Chegary was coming—she would leave Gracieuse alone until his arrival; he would believe in her sincerity, and he might be able to convince the blind creature of her honesty. Yet, on the other hand, she dreaded his arrival. If he were to hear the evil reports, his first act might be in accordance with the customary rashness of his sex; he might rush off to visit condign punishment on the one really in fault —Monsieur de Vieuxville. Honour assured herself that she should be glad to see him punished, but such retribution would fall heaviest upon Gracieuse—ruin her utterly. So there was still an additional reason why she must remain; it might be necessary to protect the girl against the hot-headedness of the very man whom Honour, with delicious inconsistency, proposed to make her shield.

Perhaps he could persuade Monsieur Galais to remove himself and his daughter to Bayonne;

some way might open—she could not leave yet. In the mean time she was perfectly idle—the examination into her affairs unfulfilled. Active work was going on in the factory, with the improved machinery and apparatus, and in the new refinery. People were congratulating her upon the grand scale on which her business was marching, and she knew no more than they the object of these extensive operations.

Monsieur Pellerin congratulated her too, and discovered her ignorance, and she perceived that he had; and he troubled her by growing meditative, and talking in a general way of the necessity for caution—the imperative need that any manufacturer should be the *bonâ fide* head of his concern.

Still she put off her purpose of holding an interview with her manager, and the days flew by as if they had wings, for all each day in its course dragged so heavily upon her hands.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE WAR-TURBAN'S FATE.

The devil entered Antoine Pellerin, and inspired him with the idea of giving a magnificent *fête*, at a fine villa he had lately purchased near Rouen. It was the show-place of the environs, and he had refurnished the house in magnificent style, and improved the extensive grounds at a lavish expenditure.

People told him he must mean to marry; but Monsieur Pellerin only smiled and shrugged his shoulders. Honour Pemberton was not among the number of his acquaintance who brought this pleasant charge—he wished she had been—such jesting might have afforded an opening for the secret which the elegant Antoine longed to utter. But he came at once to consult her about his plan, and she tried to be interested.

Monsieur Pellerin had no female relative to play hostess on the occasion; he lamented this fact, and dwelt feelingly upon the virtues of

his sainted mother, who had long since gone to perfect her saintliness among the cherubim and seraphim, and grew pathetic over the loss of an only sister, who, being too vestal pure for this evil world, had early been summoned to tread the paths beyond the stars. He forbore to mention that his model parent had possessed one quality eminently adapted to taking part in the wearisome duty popularly supposed to devolve upon cherubs—that of "crying ceaselessly"; for she owned a voice whose original volume and ear-piercing strength rumour declared to have been increased by years of utterance, during early life, of those remarkable chants peculiar to the fish-women of Marseilles. Monsieur betrayed an equal forgetfulness of the fact that rumour also asserted his sister ought to take rank rather among martyrs than vestals, for she had sacrificed herself to the good of humanity to the extent of owning four husbands alive at once, and had retired to breathe her last sighs in a southern isle, where France despatched convicts—probably animated by the laudable desire of employing the closing years of her mortal pilgrimage in an effort to redeem those unfortunates from the error of their ways.

But whatever road the pair had chosen, they

were at present "basking under other and higher skies," Monsieur Pellerin announced, with such certainty in his tone that no reasonable person could doubt his possessing some private information as to their whereabouts; certainly not Honour, for she cared nothing about the absent or their wanderings. But this lack of the sacred feminine element in his home (I quote Monsieur Pellerin again, only spoken in French the phrase sounded pretty and pathetic, instead of stilted and bombastic, as it does translated into English) rendered it necessary to induce some lady of position to act as hostess on this important occasion. Very important it really was to Monsieur himself, for he meant it to establish at once and for ever his claims to being ranked among the gentry of Normandy. He could employ inducements to bring certain notables down from Paris. Honour readily agreed to invite her own friends; but he especially wanted to secure the gay new people and the *ancienne noblesse* of Vieuxville, and, owing to the present divided state of the neighbourhood, this was difficult.

In all these matters Honour interested herself, glad to be taken away from her weary reflections and her tiresome *Ich*. But Monsieur Pellerin, not being able to read her mind, mis-

construed her motives, and during these days his hopes grew buoyant. In her quality of young widow it was impossible for Honour to accept the position of hostess. Monsieur Pellerin admitted this, with a sigh of real regret which she did not even hear. His idea was, since he could not ask Madame Pemberton, to induce some dame belonging to the highest grade of Vieuxville aristocracy to preside, because in that case all the other members of the clan would feel bound to appear.

And of all people he selected Mademoiselle de Hauteville—the haughtiest, the most unapproachable of the whole set—who recognized him, certainly, when they met, but who did it as if she were regarding him from a distance through a reversed telescope. Honour positively admired his audacity, and was ready to help. But difficulties suggested themselves to her mind. If Mademoiselle were to consent—a thing she thought very improbable, as she frankly told him—she would undoubtedly wish to exclude the De Marsans, and this, Honour added, with equal frankness, would affect her personally. If Madame de Marsan were left out, she, Honour Pemberton, would not go.

"You see to what an unfortunate bachelor

exposes himself when he attempts something to please your sex," said Pellerin, smiling. "But I think I can arrange that part, and persuade Mademoiselle to allow your friend to be invited."

Honour promised to see Mademoiselle de Hauteville without delay, supposing that Pellerin would desire her to break the ice for him; indeed, to put the case more plainly than she would have wished to do for fear of wounding his sensibilities, learn whether he might even venture to present himself before the great lady.

But Honour had not yet sounded the depths of Antoine Pellerin's courage—or audacity—whatever was the rightful name to give the feeling which nerved him when he had any purpose to carry out whereon his mind was firmly set.

"Since you are so kind, may I be presumptuous enough to ask if you could go to-day?" he asked.

"Oh, yes; I will order the carriage at once. I have been meaning for some time to visit Mademoiselle," she replied, thinking that he meant to propose coming back to hear the account of the spinster's views upon the matter. But he afforded her a fresh thrill of

astonishment by another question, uttered in his mildest, most deprecating tone.

"Would you permit me to accompany you? In that way we might be able to settle the whole affair at once."

"With great pleasure, so far as I am concerned," Honour answered, scarcely knowing how to frame the hint she considered it only fair to give. He could not be in the least acquainted with old Mademoiselle's peculiarities, or the slight check she was in the habit of putting upon them, else he never would dream of going to the house until it was certain that the lady would not consider his plan a bit of presumptuous impertinence. "She is very odd," Honour continued, hesitatingly; "you must not be surprised if—"

"She were to turn me out of doors, or ask me if I had missed my way and mistaken her *salon* for the servants' hall," he added, completing her sentence with a quiet smile. "No; she will not do that. She is magnificently conscious of my existence. I know her brother very well; I was once able to point out to him some investment for a little spare money he had. He often comes to see me, and I have been twice at the château. Mademoiselle tolerated me; she happened to be

in her brother's apartment on one occasion."

He laughed a little; Honour laughed too, out of politeness, though she still felt somewhat nervous on his account.

"I believe I could tell what you are thinking," he said, after a pause. "You are wondering how I can be snobbish enough to want to force myself on the acquaintance of a person who will barely tolerate me."

Honour had not put her thought in so harsh a fashion; still his solution was sufficiently near the truth to leave her at a loss what to answer. However, he spared her the trouble, by continuing,—

"If I know myself, that is not the feeling. I have a due regard for rank, but not an undue one. I am a self-made man, though I have, too, certain family claims—in spite of Monsieur de Vieuxville's unbelief; still, what I am, I owe to my own exertions, and I am proud of it."

"And you have a right to be," Honour replied.

"Every great family had a beginning," pursued he, meditatively; "the founder is always looked back upon with respect. To my mind, the man of to-day, who, by his energy, makes

a place for himself in the world—honourably, uprightly—deserves respect, too, on the same grounds that the energetic man of old times does."

"There also I agree with you," Honour said.

"Then, supposing, even, that I belonged to what Mademoiselle de Hauteville would contemptuously call 'the people'? I am educated; I believe I have the manners and tastes of a gentleman. It is natural I should desire for my associates refined and educated people; more than this, the consideration afforded by such intercourse. I do not think I should ever cringe or sacrifice my dignity, but I cannot feel that I am doing it in my action here. Mademoiselle is a narrow-minded, antiquated dame; still her presence at my house will be of use to me—will make an impression on the world. I consider myself as right to employ it to obtain social success as I should to engage the services of a noted stockbroker in a business transaction."

His manner of saying all this, more than the words themselves, would have caused any listener to decide that he was no snob. Honour liked him better than she had ever done before, and he perceived the favourable impression he had produced.

"I beg your pardon for my long speech," he said, laughing, yet with a certain earnestness in his voice; "I could not bear to have any person whom I respect so much as I do you misjudge my motives."

"Indeed I do not," she answered.

"Thanks," he said. "Now then, since you are good-natured enough to consent, we will attack Mademoiselle in her ancestral stronghold."

They both laughed again. Honour was already dressed for going out, and the carriage drove to the door while they were conversing. Mrs. Somers entered the room; but when she heard whither her relative was bound, she declined accompanying her. Aurora had never forgotten her adventure that unfortunate night, and was determined nothing should tempt her to set foot in the Hauteville château again.

"In my opinion, Mademoiselle is as mad as a hatter," she said, with a severity she seldom betrayed; "and her brother is madder. Anybody who likes may go to see them, but I have no fancy for visiting lunatic asylums."

Aurora's imagination was not brilliant, still she possessed a faculty very general among humanity—that of being able, in reviewing an unpleasant incident, to give her personal share

a colouring which should soothe her vanity, by putting the blame or ridicule upon others. She could recollect distinctly how absurd Mademoiselle and her brother had appeared; but where she was herself concerned, only recollected that she had been horribly frightened and abominably treated.

"I may be surprised at such predilections in others," she continued, glancing first at Honour, then the guest, and nodding her head toward each in turn, to point her moral; "but I say nothing. Only I do not wish to be asked to trust myself in lions' dens, not being Daniel or Nebuchadnezzar either."

So Honour and Monsieur Pellerin drove away together, chatting pleasantly, and Honour was glad to put by any doubts which troubled her as to their reception.

They met Monsieur de Vieuxville out on horseback: he lifted his hat with ceremonious politeness; but Honour fancied she caught an expression of wonder in his face, followed by a contemptuous smile. She felt more kindly inclined than ever toward Pellerin, and more determined to use every effort to persuade Mademoiselle; though she did not ask herself why the opinion of a man whom she detested and despised, as she did Monsieur de Vieux-

ville, had the power to move her in any way.

The carriage turned into the neglected old park—or such remnants of it as still remained the property of these last scions of the ancient family—passed under the avenue of oaks, gloomy as a vault, with the rooks screaming overhead, and reached the time-stained dwelling, which looked as severe and haughty as Mademoiselle herself.

Little Monsieur was standing on the *perron* when the landau drew up. The sight of Mrs. Pemberton fluttered him. He was a worshipper of female beauty in a small way, and his first thought was a kind of mental prayer that his wig might not be awry. Then his short-sighted eyes made out who her companion was, and a sudden fear of his sister's wrath, a dread that it might fall heavily and indiscriminately upon himself and the visitors, rendered the complimentary speech he had begun a very lame affair.

Pellerin perfectly understood the cause of the little gentleman's confusion, and smiled secretly at Honour. He looked so composed and at ease that she was ashamed to be nervous.

"I hope your sister is at home," she said to Monsieur.

"Yes, yes—no doubt! She will be charmed," gasped Monsieur, collecting his wits sufficiently to offer her his arm.

The three entered the corridor; one of the ancient, dilapidated servants appeared, and opened the door of a room on the *rez-de-chaussée*. They could see Mademoiselle throned in a great chair near the further end, and Honour perceived that her venerable locks were crowned with the war-turban: she had lived long enough in the neighbourhood to know what state of mind that head-dress portended.

"My dear Désirée, here is Madame Pemberton good enough to come and visit you," piped Monsieur, with an agonized cheerfulness, his shrill voice less under control even than usual. The appalling old woman did not stir.

"You scream so, that I cannot hear a word; and the room is so dark I cannot see," was all she said.

Honour dropped Monsieur's arm, and hurried toward the throne.

"Now that I am near enough to be recognized, I trust you will say you are glad I have come," she said, holding out her hand.

"Oh, Madame Pemberton," returned the spinster. "You must have lost your way, I

suppose. It is a very unusual pleasure to see you in this house."

"You do not act as if it was a pleasure," said Honour, laughing; "and you are very wicked and unjust—I have been twice since you have been near me."

"In my youth, age was supposed to have its privileges; but that is past, I presume," replied Mademoiselle. Still she took Honour's hand; even smiled at some jesting answer her visitor gave. Then her eyes wandered on to the spot where her brother and Pellerin had paused.

"I have brought Monsieur Pellerin with me," said Honour.

"Monsieur who?" demanded Mademoiselle.

"My friend, Monsieur Pellerin," replied Honour, looking her full in the face.

"Oh!" said Mademoiselle, "I hope your friend, Monsieur—Pellerin, is quite well."

That gentleman advanced, and paid his respects quietly and courteously—with great deference,—but, somehow, Honour felt it a deference offered to age.

Little Monsieur fluttered and danced about to accommodate Honour with a chair, talking very fast all the while. Mademoiselle let Pellerin finish his compliments, then she said,—

"Perhaps you will sit down, too, Monsieur —Pellerin; and if my brother will give anybody a chance to speak—"

"I beg pardon!" shivered little Monsieur.

"Which he seldom does," pursued the old woman—"Madame Pemberton will tell me how she happened to be good-natured enough to come and see me, and bring her—friend."

"Because I have a great favour to ask of you," said Pellerin, boldly; "and Madame was so kind as to give me her countenance."

"Ah," said Mademoiselle, "and what is this favour a poor old woman like me could have in her power to show Monsieur—Pellerin?"

Honour was in momentary fear of an explosion, and hastened to fling herself into the conversation.

"Monsieur Pellerin is about giving a grand *fête*," she observed.

"Ah, at his new villa," cried Monsieur, eagerly. "Delightful idea! Splendid old place—you know it, Désirée."

"I did when it belonged to the Duke de Fontanges," replied she. "Well, Madame, you say *fête*, and Monsieur says favour; and my brother will not permit either of you to finish, so I am as much in the dark as ever what either of you mean."

"I beg pardon!" again shivered Monsieur.

Honour wished herself leagues away, but Pellerin seemed perfectly at his ease. Then Honour began to feel angry with the old woman, and this restored her courage. She was of importance enough in the social world to do what she pleased, present whom she liked, and Mademoiselle should not browbeat anybody she had styled her friend. Perhaps the shrewd spinster read this in her face; and though she would scold people as much as she chose, she had no desire to quarrel with Honour, angry as she was with her in these days, because her hopes in regard to De Vieux-ville appeared dashed to the ground.

"Now, which am I to hear about first—the *fête* or the favour?" she asked, with a grim attempt at pleasantry.

"The two are inextricably mixed," laughed Honour.

"Then, if you please, you shall explain both," returned Mademoiselle, relapsing into utter grimness.

"As you know, Monsieur Pellerin is not a married man—"

"I did not know," said Mademoiselle, in cold parenthesis.

"Some lady must be found to act as hostess,"

continued Honour, regardless of the chilling interruption. "He came to consult me, and I agreed with him that the most fitting person to ask would be you."

"You do me infinite honour," returned Mademoiselle, with a dangerous light kindling in her eyes, and an ominous calmness in her voice. She paused, and Monsieur Pellerin took advantage of this to say,—

"I should have asked my friend Arthur de Chantal to beg his mother to do me this great kindness, but I know she is not well, and, from various causes, not in the mood for gaieties, so I could not let her son trouble her by such a request."

While he was speaking, Mademoiselle wheeled round on her throne and glared at him. Honour trembled. Little Monsieur was near a spasm. Both thought Pellerin had uttered the most unlucky speech possible, and expected to hear him receive a withering rebuke upon his presumption in speaking of a De Chantal as his friend. But Pellerin regarded her fixedly as he spoke, and the old woman's hawk-eyes absolutely sank under his glance.

Pellerin had a certain moneyed hold upon the young heir to the fallen fortunes of the De Chantals, and Mademoiselle knew it. She

trembled from head to foot with rage, but, for perhaps the first time in her life, had to control her temper. There was a double reason for the necessity; she did not want to offend Honour, and any rudeness at present to Pellerin would be an offence, and she feared to outrage him on Arthur's account.

She sat speechless for a few seconds. There was a silence, only broken by low murmurs from little Monsieur, which seemed to be ejaculations of pleasure in regard to the *fête*, interspersed by deprecating coughs; but, indeed, he was in such a fright that he had not the least idea what he did.

"And, therefore," continued Pellerin, still with his eyes fixed on Mademoiselle, "I have ventured to come to you. It is true that it may seem presumptuous on my part—having the honour of only a very slight acquaintance—but I have known your brother for some years—"

"Of course, of course!" croaked Monsieur.

Mademoiselle reduced him to silence by one baleful glare.

"And as I know I shall be honoured by the presence of many distinguished people, it seemed only a fit return on my part to try and have them received by the lady whose posi-

tion places her at the head of Normandy society."

Then Mademoiselle spoke. Her hard old voice trembled slightly.

"I am not prepared to give an answer on the moment," she said. "I should like to consult with Madame Pemberton a little. Monsieur Pellerin will excuse an old woman's lack of ceremony! Hilaire, take Monsieur out to see the carp."

The two men left the room. As soon as the door closed behind them, Mademoiselle turned fiercely upon Honour.

"What does this mean?" she demanded. "How dared that man come to me with such a request? how dared you bring him?"

"That last question, Mademoiselle de Hauteville, you must retract," said Honour. "You force me to remind you that you forget to whom you speak. When I came to Normandy, you sought my acquaintance, not I yours. I receive Monsieur Pellerin: he is well received by many people whose social position is equal to yours or mine. He is by manners and education a gentleman. The world is good three hundred years too old for you and me to stop to inquire whether he was born a duke's son or a carpenter's."

"Good!" cried old Mademoiselle. "I don't believe there is another creature in the province would dare speak to me like that. I admire you for it."

"And I beg your pardon if I forgot I was a young woman and you an elderly one," said Honour.

"An old one, you mean, and a silly," boomed Mademoiselle. "Come! You would not marry the man? People say that is what he means; it was that made me feel so furious when you came in with him."

"I do not believe he ever thought of such a thing," Honour replied, "and it is certain that I never shall think of it."

"Good!" pronounced Mademoiselle again. "Kiss, me, my dear!"

Honour pressed her lips to the wrinkled cheek bent toward her. Mademoiselle patted her shoulder with her hand, saying sadly, — "Everything is wrong – it gets worse each day. My dear, sometimes I wish I was safe in my grave—but, at least, you and I will not quarrel."

"No, that we will not," returned Honour, warmly.

"I am vexed with you; but I can't blame you," continued Mademoiselle, in the same

odd, choked voice. "It all looks strange, but he must be right; he must—I know it will be cleared up! My dear, he does not even come to see me now-a-days."

Honour knew perfectly well that she meant De Vieuxville, that she was alluding to her disappointment at seeing the two estranged, but this was a subject upon which conversation was not possible.

"Now that you are convinced I contemplate no insanity, and so can forgive me, let us send for those two men, and put Monsieur Pellerin out of suspense," she said, lightly.

Mademoiselle sighed, nodded, and signed her to ring the bell. Not a word more passed till the two gentlemen appeared. Honour had moved away to a distant window, and was gazing out into the neglected shrubberies. Before she knew they had returned, little Monsieur was standing beside her, chirping volubly, greatly relieved that the tempest seemed so completely dissipated.

"Monsieur Pellerin," Mademoiselle said, graciously, "I thank you for the honour you have done me; it was kind in a young man to remember an old woman. I would like to oblige you, but there are reasons—they do

not concern you personally, believe me—which force me to decline."

"Perhaps you will consider me more presumptuous than ever," he answered; "but I think I know what they are. I am sure they arise out of the troubles in the neighbourhood."

"Yes, they do," she said.

"That is one reason why I am so anxious to have your presence," he went on. "Mademoiselle de Hauteville, I am a very blunt man—I cannot beat about the bush. I like young De Chantal. I am sorry for what has happened. I must invite Madame de Marsan—your presence as hostess would prevent her accepting the invitation. Arthur will be there, and—"

He paused. Mademoiselle was silent for a little. Presently she called,—

"Madame Pemberton!"

Honour came forward.

"I have promised Monsieur to frighten his guests by the sight of my ugly old face," she continued.

Honour was delighted, and little De Hauteville beamed and danced about in his joy that his sister had not annihilated her guests. But Monsieur Pellerin had not finished yet; he

meant to have De Vieuxville at his *fête*, and he knew that only Mademoiselle could persuade him. He said nothing unpleasant, but he managed to make the old woman feel —she could not have told how—that if De Vieuxville scorned the invitation, there were more disagreeable details concerning the refusal to fight the duel than had yet come about. There was a good deal of talk about the *fête*, then the visitors took leave.

"I cannot thank you sufficiently, Madame," said Pellerin, as the carriage passed down the avenue.

"Indeed, you managed the whole matter yourself: you decidedly achieved a conquest of Mademoiselle," returned Honour.

She had not comprehended the secret consciousness of power which he had rendered evident to the old maid where Arthur de Chantal was concerned, nor had she heard the words in which he contrived to impress on Mademoiselle that it would be unwise in De Vieuxville to provoke further disclosures, as little Monsieur had been giggling in Honour's ear at the time. So the feeling in her mind was that sort of admiration any impulsive person always has for a man who carries his point by sheer force of will—for this was the light

in which Monsieur Pellerin's triumph appeared to Honour.

As soon as her guests left the house, Mademoiselle de Hauteville rose from her throne, and mounted the stairs to her chamber. She closed the door, and stood alone in the sacred seclusion of that vestal retreat—rather a dreary place most persons would have thought—sparsely furnished, and not an article, save the bed-linen (and that, by its numberless dainty darns, showed it was old enough), which had not existed for at least a century and a half. But just for these reasons Mademoiselle loved the dark old chamber: perhaps, too,—hard and grim as she was,—certain tender youthful memories endeared it to her; for she had slept here since childhood, had dreamed here those vague dreams of girlhood which in her day must have come to her as well as another.

She went up to the blurred mirror, that had reflected her image when she was young and handsome, when her wrinkles had been dimples, and her stiffness only majestic grace. She looked—not at her own reflection, but at the war-turban—and sighed as she looked. This dread-inspiring head-gear had descended to her from her grandmother; while crowned by

its awful shadow, she had been worsted, defeated. She, Désirée Honorée de Hauteville, had been forced to yield her iron will; and, of all persons, to a *parvenu*—a *nouveau riche*—an upstart—a Pellerin!

She hated the man, yet she shared somewhat Honour's feeling of admiration for his prowess; he must be brave to have ventured to enter the lists against her. But she had been beaten: she was afraid to anger him, lest she should bring added trouble to her friend Madame de Chantal, through that unworthy son; afraid of evil consequences to De Vieuxville's already spotted reputation.

She had been beaten—forced to comply with Pellerin's demands—do exactly what he bade! She, the descendant and namesake of that sainted granddame whom no human being had ever conquered; who, in the days of the Reign of Terror, once confronted a band of *sans culottes* at the outer door of the château, wearing this very emblem of majesty, and awed them into flight.

The time had come when Mademoiselle was no longer worthy to bear this priceless heirloom upon her brow, and she knew it. She studied herself in the mirror; she raised her hands and lifted the war-turban from her

forehead, with something of the horrified sensation the Scottish maiden of old may have endured when her girlish heart had brought her to so sad a pass that the virginal snood must be torn from her tresses and put aside for ever.

The whole performance might have been ludicrous to a looker-on, but it was a very solemn business to Mademoiselle. She raised the turban from her brow; a mist obscured the keenness of her hawk eyes; she cast a last, scornfully sorrowing glance at her denuded front, moved across the chamber, took a pair of scissors from a table, and deliberately cut the war-turban into a hundred bits.

She was no longer worthy to wear the relic —no other ever should!

I would not swear that the mist across her sight did not gather into actual tears! She shuddered at every click of the remorseless blades, but pursued her task to the end. When nothing was left save a heap of shapeless fragments, she gathered up the pile and hid it in the darkest corner of a closet, and sat down to indulge in melancholy meditation.

She still unconsciously grasped the shears, thereby giving herself so odd a resemblance to one of the figures in the Florentine picture

of "The Fates," that had an imaginative person entered unaware, he must have started back in awe, believing he had intruded upon the haunt sacred to Atropos, and that her sisters were not far away.

CHAPTER IX.

LES VIEILLES ROCHES.

Having accepted a position, Désirée Honorée de Hauteville was not a woman to shrink from accepting its full responsibilities; above all, nothing in her conduct must give the world an opportunity of suspecting she had been actuated by any influence save that of her own imperious will.

Her Amazonian front must be borne as loftily as ever. She and the shade of her sainted grandmother might know defeat had rendered her unworthy to wear the ancestral turban, but an added sternness and majesty must so awe common eyes they would not venture to note her closely enough to perceive that the badge of sovereignty had disappeared.

The very morning after her encounter with Pellerin, Mademoiselle ordered the ancient chariot, and went forth to announce to her contemporary relics of a past age the decision to which she had come, the support—no, low as

she was fallen, Mademoiselle could not have endured that word, even in her thoughts—the approval she expected on their part.

The most difficult person with whom she had to deal would be her old friend Madame de Chantal, so she courageously paid this visit first, and the tone in which she bade the coachman drive to that lady's château was so solemn and awful, that the antique servitor felt as if he were conducting her in the van of a state funeral, and little Monsieur, whose companionship she had rejected with scant courtesy, stood on the *perron* and shivered as he heard.

It was a Friday, and Mademoiselle, familiar with the habits of her little group of contemporanean fossils—each grand and awful as a Druid stone—knew that she should find them all at home. They would have gone to early mass, and after that would not leave their dwellings until toward evening.

She and Madame de Chantal had been girls together, and had lived in close intimacy ever since, but no show of ceremony was ever dispensed with on that account. Arrived at the château, Mademoiselle sat in her carriage, upright and stately enough to have served as a model for Boadicea in her battle-chariot, while her coroneted card was sent in to Madame de

Chantal. When the servant returned with a many-syllabled message from his mistress, praying Mademoiselle de Hauteville to do her the honour to enter, the spinster alighted, and trode with a martial step up stone staircases, along echoing corridors, through endless suites of gloomy rooms, to the apartment where Madame de Chantal sat, arrayed in solemn black, a perfect picture of the châtelaine of bygone days, even to the keys that hung at her girdle and the intricate tapestry-work which occupied her withered hands.

She rose as Mademoiselle appeared, advanced a few steps, and dropped a curtsy such as could not have been witnessed out of Normandy or Brittany since the days of Louis XIV. Mademoiselle stopped short near the door, and executed a similar *pas seul* in her turn. Then both moved forward; when near the centre of the room, each paused to perform a similar awe-inspiring reverence. By this time they were close enough to see each other's faces clearly. The hostess knew instinctively that her guest was the bearer of evil tidings; the visitor knew that such presentiment was in the other's mind.

"My dear Désirée, how good of you!" said Madame de Chantal; and they shook hands and embraced.

"My dear Hermance, I have to apologize for coming on a Friday morning, but my errand is of importance," was the reply.

They sat down opposite one another and looked anxiously in each other's eyes. Madame de Chantal trembled a little; her first thought was of her son; a dread that her friend might have brought bad news of the erring boy over whom her heart yearned piteously, however unyielding a sense of duty might render her conduct.

Absorbed in her own reflections, Mademoiselle did not remember, as she would have done at a calmer moment, that her friend's fancy would immediately suggest her prodigal as the object of this visit; and Madame had to put by pride, and cry out, in a voice as tremulous as that of the weakest mother unsupported by the traditions of the Montmorencis,—

"Désirée, Désirée—it is not—nothing has happened to him—to my Arthur?"

"No, no, my best—certainly not," Mademoiselle hastened to reply.

"Ah!" sighed Madame, and leaned back in her *fauteuil* with an expression of relief on her worn face. Whatever the tidings might be, she could bear them, since no trouble menaced her boy.

Mademoiselle's countenance grew defiant in its sternness; her voice boomed out its deepest bass notes, uttering her confession without preamble or preface.

"Monsieur Antoine Pellerin proposes to give a *fête:* he has asked me to act as hostess on the occasion, and I have consented."

She paused; her form more rigid than ever, though an instant before one would have thought that impossible, and she stared straight into her friend's eyes with an awful frown.

For an instant Madame de Chantal looked as if she would burst into tears; then her old face flamed up with the Montmorenci blood, and her soft, mild voice was in its way as full of haughty pride as Mademoiselle's resolute tones, when she said,—

"I do not know the person of whom you speak, consequently I cannot congratulate him on the honour he receives from Mademoiselle de Hauteville."

They had been friends during all the years that lay between childhood and age, but never before had Madame de Chantal ventured to address her companion in this tone. Mademoiselle linked her hands hard together in her lap—her gloves always had the air of ancient

gauntlets—and continued, in the same iron voice,—

"Monsieur Pellerin is in manners a gentleman, as manners go now-a-days. He is rich; the levelling tendencies of the age force us to accept the existence of such as he; it is better, since this is so, to do it in a way which shall still leave them bound by our supremacy."

Madame de Chantal did not speak.

"I shall act as hostess; I shall expect to welcome my friends," pursued Mademoiselle, after a brief pause.

"Monsieur Pellerin's friends, you mean?" returned Madame; "I have not the honour of his acquaintance."

Mademoiselle was not angry; she knew that at heart her friend was alarmed at thus braving her; she respected the feeling which nerved her to do it. She was thinking how, more than forty years ago, she had sacrificed the dream of her youth to this woman. She had loved Arthur de Chantal's father; he had loved her. They were both poor; Hermance rich, and she also loved the man. Désirée had herself, through her grandmother, arranged the marriage between the pair. Now she had submitted to the crowning humiliation of her age for the sake of Arthur's son. Always she

had been faithful to her friend; never a moment's bitterness had darkened her heart; she could not be angry now, even while reflecting that the woman was as unconscious of the present sacrifice as she had been of the first.

"You seldom go out," she said, "so I scarcely hoped for your presence; but I wished to tell you of my determination."

"I owe you many thanks for taking so much trouble," returned Madame.

They glared at one another again. Simultaneously both proud old faces began to work and quiver in every line.

"Hermance!" cried Mademoiselle, in a voice that was half a menace, half an entreaty.

"Désirée!" answered Madame, in a tone which held both pride and terror.

Then their two hands stretched out and clasped; an instant more, and their arms were about each other's neck, and Madame was crying softly, and Mademoiselle choking back a sob, though her hard old eyes were dry.

"I know you have some good reason," whispered Madame; "forgive me, dear—I am not just myself these days."

"Oh!" exclaimed Mademoiselle, with sudden bitterness, "the wonder is that life in these days leaves us any trace of our old selves."

To get back to composure, they talked for a few moments of ordinary matters, and were as elaborately civil and complimentary as if they had met in the *salons* of Versailles in its grandest days. When they could trust their calmness, Mademoiselle began asking about Arthur, and once more they relapsed into a couple of kindly, loving old women, and Madame told her troubles, and Mademoiselle consoled her as best she could. The poor mother had not seen him since their angry parting at Trouville; he did not answer her letters; she knew, too, that he had been in the neighbourhood—that he came solely to see Effie de Marsan.

"He will be at the *fête*," Mademoiselle said: "that Pellerin is on friendly terms with all our young men—too friendly by half."

"And that woman will be there!" cried Madame.

"Scarcely probable, when she knows I am hostess," returned Mademoiselle, with a grim smile.

This was a consolation at least; but Madame would not hear of going herself, though Mademoiselle pointed out to her the opportunity the festivity would afford for a meeting with Arthur.

"I could not do it," sighed the mother; "I have not the self-control I used to possess. I should say the wrong thing—make matters worse. I cannot go—I cannot! Do not urge me."

"I will not," returned Mademoiselle. "But you feel that I am right. I cannot stop any longer. I want them all to know what I have decided"; the "all" of course meaning their knot of titled intimates who, like themselves, had been born at least a century too late.

"I will go with you if you like," Madame said; and her friend felt that she could have given no higher proof, not only of confidence, but a desire to express her contrition at having for an instant rebelled against the supremacy she had all her life acknowledged.

So they mounted into the ancient chariot together, and drove from one gloomy old château to another; from Villevieille to Rocheville; from La Bouille to Rochetaille; and on through the round of fallen *noblesse* who have no part in this story, any more than they had in the world at large, important as they deemed themselves.

Not a creature ventured to expostulate; the fiat had gone forth, and they not only submitted,—they approved, and were prepared to

honour Monsieur Pellerin's *fête* with their presence.

This duty performed, Mademoiselle drove her friend home; and the two were so completely worn out by the weight of the armour which they had supported, that they were glad, in the seclusion of Madame's *salon*, to doff their cuirasses, turn into old women again, and strengthen their chilled blood by the daintiest breakfast Madame's cook could prepare, and a bottle of the rarest Burgundy the almost empty cave could still produce on an occasion.

Mademoiselle bade her hostess adieu, and departed; but she was not yet free to return to the shadows of her ancestral mansion. She must see Monsieur de Vieuxville; must persuade him to accept Pellerin's invitation. And here Mademoiselle was able to gratify herself a little; she could forget that her real reason in wishing him to go to the *fête* was because she feared more slander and evil tales if he offended the rival sugar-manufacturer, in her satisfaction at the idea of bringing De Vieuxville and Honour Pemberton together. Some good might grow out of it; they might arrive at an explanation, in spite of the lady's suspicions and the man's obstinacy.

From the window of his bureau in the counting-house De Vieuxville saw the chariot draw up before the entrance, and beheld Mademoiselle, grand in threadbare velvet and ancient lace, her head decorated with an antiquated bonnet, which in form and colour suggested a miniature hearse. He went out to receive her, welcomed her cordially, led her into his private room, and inducted her into the easiest chair.

Mademoiselle plunged into her errand as abruptly as she had done with Madame de Chantal, though she assumed a different tone.

"I do not often ask favours," said she; "I have come to ask one of you, though, and I tell you in advance that I expect it to be granted."

De Vieuxville smiled at this characteristic mode of issuing a command, even while she called it a favour.

"Then of course it will be," he said.

"Well, you do not pay so much attention to my wishes now-a-days that I can feel certain," grumbled she; "but this time you must, or we quarrel."

"I do not think we shall ever do that, *ma tante*," he said, employing, as he sometimes did when they were alone, the title he used to

give her in his childish days; a freedom warranted, Mademoiselle considered, by the fact that, when the world was many hundreds of years younger, intermarriages between their respective houses had been frequent enough. "Tell me what it is I am to do."

"You are to go, like the rest of the world,—the world being an idiot,—to a *fête* of Antoine Pellerin's giving, where you will see me and my ugliness mistress of ceremonies," she replied, with an attempt at the grim pleasantry to which she sometimes condescended.

He gazed at her in an astonishment he could not conceal.

"You shut yourself up too much," she boomed, frowning at him; "you are getting to be a regular skeleton! People will call you mad presently, and I do not choose they should. You will go to the *fête*, and you will laugh and dance and behave yourself properly —and that 's all there is to be said."

He understood she meant to hint that people whispered his seclusion rose from shame of his conduct in regard to the duel, but this did not move him much. He was touched, though, by her solicitude: he could feel that.

"If I receive an invitation, I shall certainly go," he replied.

"I began by telling you that you were to do so," snapped Mademoiselle.

He only patted her wrinkled hands (from which she had drawn her gloves as she entered, sharing the masculine dislike to those fetters) between both his, and said never a word. Mademoiselle looked at him, and her stern features softened and grew troubled.

"I can't help being fond of you," she said, so suddenly, and in a voice so preternaturally deep, that it would have made a nervous person start. "I am afraid you don't deserve it; but I 'm too old to change! Baby, boy, and man, I have loved you—I can't stop now."

"I hope there is no reason why you should?" he asked, as he stooped to pick up the glove which had fallen from her lap.

"I hope there is not," she replied. "I should not be here if I thought there were."

She waited; here was an opportunity for an explanation, if he could or would give such, but he only said,—

"Naturally not."

Mademoiselle took the glove he offered, seized its fellow, and flung them both vengefully on the table; the little explosion relieved her. She had known him all his life, had scolded him numberless times; yet that little

circle of Norman fossils had such odd reticences with each other that she could not bring herself to ask him point blank to tell her the truth. She knew, too, that it was quite possible his silence rose out of this very Norman obstinacy; the fact that she presumed to doubt him might be enough to seal his lips. She wanted to believe him innocent, so this credence was easiest to accept. She tried to think that she refrained from mention of the gossip concerning him and Gracieuse Galais, because such mention would be an insult—an implied doubt on her part.

"No, I should not be here," she repeated, perhaps more to convince herself than him.

He bowed his head; it was a second assent, more decided than his first answer.

She was silent for a little; discouraged too. Presently she said, with another ponderous attempt at pleasantry, —

"Well, well, *mauvais sujet*, how goes the business? Do you work too hard? Tell me about it."

He smiled; turning away his face to hide it. Tell—his plans—his—He stopped to wonder what she would say if he were deliberately to reveal the truth. She was speaking again,—

"That pretty American ought to be thankful enough to have such a painstaking manager! By Heaven! the world has lasted a little too long when I use such a word in connexion with a Vieuxville!" she cried, savagely, her composure suddenly deserting her, under a rapid contemplation of the general upsetting of all creeds and traditions beneath the influence of this debased age.

"Oh no," returned he quietly; "it would only be a proof that the Vieuxvilles had lasted too long if I could not bear my destiny with equanimity."

"I shall swear in a minute, if you begin any of those accursed democratic theories!" thundered Mademoiselle. "I beg you will respect my prejudices, ridiculous as they may appear to the youth of this degenerate century, and not say a word more."

He was almost as eager to escape further talk of Honour Pemberton as to avoid any conversation about her business affairs.

"I hope Monsieur is well?" he said, tranquilly.

"To the devil with Monsieur!" shouted the old woman. "I am not thinking of Monsieur, and you know it, Armand!"

He looked at her with a troubled smile, and answered,—

"Then if it is of me you are thinking, be thankful, for my sake, that I have plenty of courage and strength to bear my fate."

Though she was afraid—afraid on her own account most, maybe, for she loved him—to ask questions, she could not resist taking advantage of the opening his words offered.

"Many things might be changed," she said; "at least, you should not submit in silence to endure what could be altered."

"My dear old friend," he replied, "long before you were born the curse was pronounced against my house: you believe in it—so do I sometimes, though no fatalist: I must work out my portion."

He could not have touched her more: he must have known this. Whatever revelations the future might bring, however deep the ruin and disgrace which exposure might thrust upon him, she would pity—she and the shattered fragments of the *vieilles roches* like her. Perhaps it was a comfort to his pride of caste to remember this. They would pity him as the victim of that curse, whatever a newer generation might do, and, in their desire to uphold their order, would refuse, even in their own

minds, to admit what they could not help feeling to be the truth.

This time it was Mademoiselle who abruptly changed the conversation. They talked for a while of other things; then she rose to go.

"You will come early to this diabolical *fête*, whenever it is to be—I shall want you," said she; and he promised.

As they were passing through the corridor, they met Gracieuse. Mademoiselle knew her perfectly well; in former days had often stopped her chariot when she saw the father and daughter, and conversed with them in her grandly patronising fashion. But now she scowled blackly at the girl, who stood aside for them to pass; all her irritation and humiliation rose in a storm.

"Pray, does Madame Pemberton keep girl-clerks?" she asked De Vieuxville, in an audible tone. "It neither speaks well for her taste, nor for the delicacy of the females who accept employment in a place like this."

Gracieuse shrank back, then stepped forward, as if with some angry intention of speech. Mademoiselle passed on before she could utter a word, saying,—

"Tut, tut! it is that old book-keeper's daughter: he ought to have more sense."

De Vieuxville helped her into the carriage in silence, and she drove off. When he returned, Gracieuse was gone. He went back to his room, and sat down among his books. He might not sit there much longer; the future grew blacker each day.

CHAPTER X.

PLAYING HOSTESS.

The day of Monsieur Pellerin's *fête* arrived. The weather showed as well inclined as society to do him honour; so golden and soft, that it seemed to have wandered up from the far south to brighten the rugged face of picturesque Normandy.

Antoine Pellerin was thoroughly content, and he certainly had every reason to be. Mademoiselle Hauteville never did anything by halves; and her fear that any one should suspect she girded in her soul against the part she had accepted caused her to employ every effort to render the *fête* a success; and Honour Pemberton had aided, from an honest desire to gratify her amiable acquaintance.

Mademoiselle went over to Rouen early in the day, accompanied by her mild little brother, who was greatly puzzled by his sister's conduct from first to last, though hugely gratified by the prospect of a festivity of any sort.

Désirée had not even scolded him once during the interval which succeeded between her compliance with Monsieur Pellerin's request and this day of its fulfilment. He had expected to see the war-turban constantly fluttering its sable plumes above her head; but that sign of stormy weather had not appeared, and Mademoiselle had been so silent, so patient, that the old servants shared in their master's wonder, and tired their brains with ceaseless speculations as to the cause of this unprecedented self-restraint. But, indeed, Mademoiselle had not the heart to scold; she felt old, and weary, and worn; and, for the first time in her life, lacked energy to get up any outburst of passion, though her soul was all the while dark with a *sourde*, bitter detestation of the world and all things, Monsieur Pellerin ranking prominent therein.

It was a beautiful place, and Pellerin's improvements had been carried out with exquisite taste. Mademoiselle admitted this. She praised him and his efforts; refrained from the caustic speeches wherewith she was given to troubling even the people she loved best; and little Monsieur marvelled more and more what could have come to her, and wondered if she were meditating death or matrimony—it must

have required some cause as potent to work this change.

The invitation sent to the De Marsans had been declined, as Mademoiselle felt certain it would be. Léon had done this himself, and Effie scarcely expostulated, beyond telling him that it was very foolish: people would say they were afraid of that old woman and her stupid tabbies.

"They can say what they please," he answered; "we shall not go."

The matter was not again spoken of between them, but Effie never wavered in her determination. She saw Pellerin a couple of days before, and told him she should come. He applauded her resolution, and kept her secret, enjoying in advance old Mademoiselle's horror and wrath when she should behold her enemy appear.

Honour Pemberton had met the De Marsans several times, and knew that the invitation was declined; indeed, she had never for a moment supposed it would be accepted. Mademoiselle had made no secret of the letter she wrote to Léon in Jersey; she had several times, in Honour's presence, ignored Effie's existence; of course, under such circumstances, the husband and wife would not appear where

the inflexible old woman was to act as hostess.

To Mrs. Pemberton's utter astonishment, a short time before she and Aurora were ready to set out, Madame de Marsan drove up to her house, and announced her intention of accompanying them. She was arrayed in a costume which would have done credit to the genius of Worth, and seemed in high spirits.

"I have come to go with you, if you will let me," she said. "Léon has gone to Dieppe to-day; and I am in a mood to talk, and do not wish to be condemned to a solitary journey."

"I had no idea you were going," returned Honour, rather bluntly.

"Léon changed his mind," Effie said; "poor Monsieur Pellerin was so disappointed, it was impossible to refuse. Léon really had to go to Dieppe, but he wanted me to sacrifice myself. After all, it will be good fun to ignore Mademoiselle! It is not her house, and, as Léon says, for me to stay away would look as if I were frightened by the gossip she has been so industriously spreading."

"Well, Effie," replied Honour, with her usual frankness, "I do not think it quite kind of you to get me into a difficulty. Mademoiselle will be furious at my bringing you."

"My dear child, I bring myself! I have nothing to do with her. If you are ashamed to be seen with me—if you want to side with those wicked old women in their efforts to injure my reputation (efforts which will prove futile)—say so, and of course I will not ask you to give me a seat in your carriage."

"Such a speech does not deserve an answer, and you know it," replied Honour. "All I had to say, I said to you at Trouville. I have fought for you with all my might."

"I know it! You are the darlingest girl in the world!" cried Effie. "Kiss me, and own you believe I was only careless! Léon is not angry; he is sure I only meant to be kind to that wretched little Arthur."

"I am so glad you have been frank with him," returned Honour, her face clearing. "Come with me, and welcome."

"And don't you agree with Monsieur Pellerin and Léon that I am right to go? My staying away would be a triumph to those old cats: my best plan is to appear serenely unconscious of their malevolence."

"Perhaps so; but indeed I cannot advise you. Come with me, if you like—that is all I can say.

"You know the Flandins have gone to Germany?"

"Yes; I heard so yesterday."

"By-the-by, I don't want to bring Mademoiselle's wrath down on poor Pellerin's head; let her think he was ignorant of my intention to come. I do not care in the least what she says."

Effie knew perfectly well that to appear in Mrs. Pemberton's company would insure her a cordial reception among all the Parisians, and indeed everybody, unless it might be Mademoiselle's little knot of adherents. Mademoiselle herself would have to be decently civil, however bitterly she might let her tongue wag later.

It was rather late when they reached the villa; the house and grounds were crowded. Of course the first thing to do was to make their way into the great *salon* where Mademoiselle and the host stood to receive the guests. Passing through the hall, they came upon Monsieur de Vieuxville, bound in the same direction, he too having only just arrived. Effie stopped to speak, and Honour was obliged to do the same. Then, as he stood aside for them to pass, Madame de Marsan allowed Mrs. Pemberton and Aurora to precede her.

"Pray don't be ungallant enough to leave

us cavalierless in this crowd," said she, laughing. "Since you did not offer your arm to either of the others, I will ask it for myself."

Then, a few instants later, Mademoiselle de Hauteville met a fresh defeat, so bitter that, even in the angry whirl of her thoughts, she could remember to be thankful she had destroyed the sacred turban. She saw Effie de Marsan approach; as if that were not enough, the creature walked by Honour Pemberton's side, and leaned on De Vieuxville's arm. Mademoiselle's legs fairly tottered beneath her, and her wrinkled face turned a yellowish white; but she was powerless to resent this impertinence. There were many people near, several of her confidants among them, to whom she and Madame de Chantal had declared over and over that Effie de Marsan would not dare to appear.

The next thing she knew, she was bowing to the whole party; speaking a few general words of welcome, while her blurred, angry eyes showed Honour and De Vieuxville that she was, if possible, more enraged with them than with the beautifully unconscious Effie.

They all moved on. Mademoiselle sank into a seat; she really could not stand. Pellerin bent over her; she heard him say,—

"I did not dream that she would come; you saw the refusal. I am very sorry. I did not believe she would dare venture to face you."

"It doesn't matter," shivered Mademoiselle; "I am only an old woman -of course I go to the wall in every way."

She did not know that she uttered the words audibly. She was only thinking that fate had been very cruel not to let her creep into the family mausoleum before these two defeats of her life of disappointments could overtake her. It was real, poignant suffering, and Pellerin saw it; enjoyed it, too, as a kind of triumph of his order over the fallen *noblesse*, who pretended to look down upon him and such as he.

He departed in search of Honour Pemberton, and left Mademoiselle to whatever consolations her group of intimates might find to offer; but Mademoiselle checked the opening chorus of wonder and regret.

"When one comes into a menagerie," said she, "the seeing of one unclean beast more or less is of no consequence! I am tired, and want to rest a moment; just let me alone, if you please."

However low Mademoiselle might be fallen in her own eyes, the whole coterie were afraid

of her, and obeyed without a murmur; were so much in doubt as to what she meant or thought, that they did not even venture to mention Madame de Marsan's name to any outsider, lest they should offend their leader.

In the mean time, this unscrupulous lady was wandering about the shrubberies, having exchanged De Vieuxville's arm for that of Arthur de Chantal, who had come to the *fête* for the express purpose of meeting her.

These weeks had a good deal changed him. He had been trying to drown reflection in dissipations to which he was unaccustomed, and his youthful face looked pale and worn, his great blue eyes hollow and bright with feverish fires. Effie could be sorry for him—could include him in the claim to martyrdom which she assumed for herself.

She had gained all she wished by Honour's supporting presence; had walked about with her, been recognized cordially by the people from whom she desired such greetings, and was quite ready to be free for a while from the restraint of her friend's companionship.

She meant to enjoy herself—to produce a sensation—but it was only fair to poor Arthur that he should be allowed a little half-hour of his own as a reward for his sufferings. So

she let him lead her away among the shrubberies, and he, with the selfishness of his age and temperament, plunged at once into the record of those same sufferings, which looked so black in their reviewal, that he entirely forgot there had been a few fleeting distractions during their course, as most men, whatever their years, are apt to do in a similar case.

Poor Mademoiselle's hope that some explanation might take place between Honour and De Vieuxville proved utterly vain; for, after those unavoidable greetings when they first met, not a word was exchanged between the pair.

Honour was constantly surrounded by a throng of admirers, among whom Monsieur Pellerin was to be seen whenever his duties as host would permit. Twice De Vieuxville showed an intention of approaching her, perhaps with some desperate idea of retrieving his ruined chances, but on each occasion she perceived his intention in time to circumvent it. After that he made no further effort to get near, and Honour scarcely saw him again until evening.

The villa was so large that it boasted a handsome ball-room, and on the ground-floor were several apartments so arranged that they could be thrown into one, and thus serve as a

refreshment-room. This generally craved haven was opened at twilight, and the whole crowd rushed thither with the precipitancy always observable at such a moment, whatever may be the rank of the different people that go to make up the mass.

After a while, Honour—to whom the day had seemed very long, in spite of the adulation she received—managed to escape into the corridor for a breath of fresh air. But she had literally "counted without her host."

That gentleman's vigilance was not to be eluded, and presently she found him by her side, anxiously inquiring if she were not well; if she were fatigued, and would like to go quietly into one of the *salons*, and have some refreshments sent her there.

She felt ashamed to find herself vexed at his solicitude, but she was, nevertheless. To-day it had for the first time occurred to her that her cordiality with Monsieur Pellerin could be misinterpreted. She unluckily heard a young Englishman observe to his neighbour that "The sugar fellow seemed to have made good running for the handsome Yankee widow," and she could not forget it. Perhaps, too, the speech quickened her faculties to notice what a special mark she was for the attentions of

her host. He had always been kind—so frank and open, so free from the flatteries and palpable designs of flinging himself at her head (to quote again from the aforementioned young Englishman's choice vocabulary), wherewith men in general annoyed her, that she had never thought of his getting any silly ideas in his brain.

She hoped it was not true; indeed, now that they were alone, his manner seemed so exactly what it had been during the first days of friendly intercourse, that she began to have misgivings whether she were not grown the vainest woman alive. At all events, she had no right to visit her vexation upon him; so she answered pleasantly, and they remained conversing for a few seconds.

From where they stood they commanded a view of the staircase, which was already lighted. They saw Monsieur de Vieuxville coming down. A servant going up stopped him, and held out a letter; they heard the man say,—

"Pardon, Monsieur, a telegram has just come for you; one of your men brought it."

"Thanks," De Vieuxville answered, and the domestic rushed away to fulfil some duty awaiting him on the floor above.

Monsieur de Vieuxville opened the envelope, and read the enclosure by the light of a lamp

which a marble Greek girl held out of a niche where she lived. He perused the paper twice, crumpled it in his hand, and turned back up the stairs.

"I should say your manager had received news which disturbs him," observed Pellerin, quietly. "I suppose it can have nothing to do with business; I hope not, since it would be your affair more than his."

"In that case I shall be certain to hear of it in due season, and so need not trouble myself in advance," Honour replied; but it was an effort to speak, for somehow a foreboding of evil had suddenly struck her.

"That shows a confidence in the Marquis of which he may well be proud," said Pellerin.

"I have no fault to find with Monsieur de Vieuxville," she answered, rather coldly—not from any annoyance toward the speaker, but because it was always difficult for her to utter the name of the man who, in every relation save that of business, had disappointed her so sorely.

"I trust you may always be of the same opinion," Pellerin said, lightly. "May I take you back to the supper-room?"

De Vieuxville had entered the *salon*, where Mademoiselle and a few elderly friends were quietly discussing a tray of refreshments. The

old lady was really tired, from mental excitement though, for her iron frame was not easily fatigued; and Pellerin had urged her to remain where she was, instead of encountering the crowd in the supper-room.

He had a journey before him, upon which he must set forth without a moment's delay; but he did not mention this fact. He spoke no word beyond the platitudes befitting the occasion, and these Mademoiselle received with more coldness than she had ever treated him in her life. The watchful tabbies had told her that nothing had been gained by bringing him and Honour together, and she was very angry with both. She did not so much as ask why he was going so early, and drew her hand back when he stooped to kiss it.

"That's an old-fashioned habit," said she; "and old-fashioned habits are not suited to the unceremonious generation you belong to."

So he went away, having leisure, in the midst of his haste, to feel a little hurt; more than that, as if her outbreak of ill-humour were an evil omen coming at this moment.

It was late before Honour and Madame de Marsan took their departure; indeed, the former was detained by Effie's persuasions until poor Mrs. Somers as nearly lost patience as she

was ever known to do, and, once in the carriage, indulged in sundry mild little complaints, addressed to nobody in particular, which only roused Effie's mirth, instead of awakening her contrition.

the next day.

She had meant to enjoy herself, and had done so, although she certainly had not aided her own cause; but during these days she was too reckless (an unusual frame of mind for her) to think or care about that.

When Effie reached home, she found no one up but her maid, who told her that Monsieur had returned, and gone to bed some time before; and Madame hastened to her chamber, glad at least that she was permitted to put off explanations until the next day.

CHAPTER XI.

HIS ABSENCE.

The next day came, and before it ended Honour Pemberton learned that her manager was gone; learned it by no communication from him, but a chance remark of Céline's, who had gained her knowledge through one of the clerks in the counting-house.

Of late Monsieur de Vieuxville had often absented himself for a day or two, so that his departure roused neither surprise nor suspicion in Honour's mind; she supposed that, as on previous occasions, business had taken him to Paris.

Two days more elapsed, then Honour, busy in her room with some letters, was interrupted by Céline. An overseer from the factory was below stairs, and desired to see his employer. Honour went down at once, thinking, if she gave the matter any thought, that the man wanted counsel or assistance in some personal affair. She always encouraged her people to

come freely to her for such reasons. But his errand proved very different from what she expected. Owing to Monsieur de Vieuxville's sudden departure, certain details, which came within the overseer's department, had been left unarranged. He was called upon to act, and, fearful of being blamed, had come to consult with his mistress. Honour concealed as well as she could both her surprise and ignorance, and sent him away, promising to drive over to the works in the course of the morning.

She did so immediately after the midday breakfast, going directly to the counting-house. The head clerk came out to meet her; his manner was very odd. She asked him a few questions. He could neither tell her when Monsieur de Vieuxville might be expected back, nor with whom he had left the management of affairs during his absence.

As she stood talking to him, Monsieur Galais entered the passage. The old gentleman looked pale and agitated. Honour greeted him with her usual cordiality, and asked him to accompany her to her room. The door of the apartment where the book-keepers sat was open. She could see they had all left their work, and were whispering together, while they watched her curiously.

As soon as she was alone with Monsieur Galais, she asked,—

"Do you know what this means? Where has Monsieur de Vieuxville gone?"

"I am sure it will be all set right! He will be back to-morrow at furthest. Do not believe a word of these stories," said he, eagerly.

"But what stories? What is there wrong?" demanded Honour. "Tell me at once; it is the kindest thing you can do."

"They say that—that he has run away," whispered the old man. "It is false!—I am sure it is!"

"Run away?" she repeated. "What for?"

"Do not move in the matter yet," he pleaded. "It is false—I know it is; even if the answer did come from Paris that he had not been seen there."

"Did you see him before he went? Did he leave you in charge?" she asked.

"I was absent that day," he answered.

"But was there no message left for me with anybody?"

"I cannot understand it," Monsieur said. "Only have patience; he will come back."

"In the mean time, the interests of my business demand that I should inquire into the matter," returned Honour. "To say the least,

this absence is very strange. To go away without a word to me, his employer, is a liberty, I should fancy, quite unheard of."

Poor Monsieur Galais could only entreat her to have patience; not to suspect De Vieuxville —at least, for the present; to do nothing which could lead others to suppose she did; and of course each word he uttered increased her fears and indignation.

"I did not hear till this morning that anything was wrong," continued the old gentleman; "or, rather, that the people here thought there was anything amiss. He must have been detained—must have written, and the letter gone astray."

Honour rose, and went to the door which connected with the manager's cabinet; it was locked.

"Who has the key?" she asked.

"Robert. My dear lady, I beg—"

Honour rang the bell; one of the clerks answered it.

"Send Robert here," she said.

The man came, after a little delay.

"Have you the key of that door?" she inquired.

"No, Madame: Monsieur forgot to give it to me," he replied. "Oh, Monsieur Galais,

speak to Madame! Tell her not to believe these people!"

The poor fellow was as much agitated as Galais himself.

"I must go into that room," said Honour. "I do not say I suspect Monsieur de Vieuxville, but he has left no directions with the overseers. I must look at the books and papers. I cannot let my business suffer because the manager chooses to take his pleasure."

"Oh, Madame!" cried Monsieur Galais.

Honour went up to him, and laid her hand on his shoulder.

"Dear friend," she said, in English, "if all is right, Monsieur de Vieuxville ought rather to court than avoid inspection."

After this he said no more.

"Get tools, Robert, and open that door," she ordered.

He went out in silence; came back with the necessary implements, and took off the lock. Honour entered the room; the shutters were closed, and the place dark. The old servant opened the windows at her command.

The three looked about the apartment, and back at each other. The books were in order, but the hearth was littered with blackened fragments of paper which had been burned there.

Honour sent the servant away, and she and Monsieur Galais sat down to go over the ledgers. Up to a recent date they were in perfect order, but since that a certain confusion was apparent. The drawer where De Vieuxville kept private accounts was locked.

Poor Monsieur Galais was so agitated that she urged him to go home, and at last he consented.

"I am of no use any longer," he said, mournfully. "But oh, dear Madame! do not believe anything against him!"

After he had gone, Honour sat trying to determine what she ought to do. She was interrupted by one of the book-keepers. Monsieur Pellerin desired to see her. He came in, looking at once angry, excited, and full of sympathy.

"Then it is true," he said; "the man has run away. I heard it the day after my *fête*. I should have come to you at once, only I feared to seem intrusive. I have been afraid, for some time, from certain things which reached my ears, that matters were going wrong; but I knew I disliked your manager, and blamed myself as uncharitable."

Honour was at a loss what steps to take, and said so frankly. He urged her to send at once

for Monsieur Besselère. She disliked to do anything in haste; her personal animosity toward De Vieuxville rendered her more anxious to be perfectly just.

Monsieur Pellerin almost echoed the words which in her earliest moments of excitement she had uttered to the old book-keeper.

"If he has done no wrong, Madame, he has nothing to fear. If illness or any other unknown cause detains him, he will be the first, on his return, to say that you have acted rightly."

Still Honour hesitated; to call in a lawyer, even if she consulted him as a friend, seemed to make matters look very black indeed.

"Then, Madame, I must tell you why it is imperatively necessary you should do so," Monsieur Pellerin said. "Reports have spread that your manager has defrauded you and run away; the credit of your house is in question —with your clear head you must see this."

She put by her last trace of womanish irresolution.

"It must be done," she said, "and at once."

"If you permit, I will attend to it," returned he,

"Thanks," she said, holding out her hand,

with a faint smile; "you are always the most considerate and helpful of friends."

"Ah, Madame, I wish there was something I could do to merit those words," he answered, not with any air of gallantry, speaking so gravely that the tone sounded almost sad.

All the same, Monsieur Antoine left the counting-house with feelings of such elation that, to use the old simile, he seemed to tread on air. He believed that he was nearing the goal.

He telegraphed for the lawyer, and so urgently, that the next morning Monsieur Besselère arrived. He had replied to the message, that he might be expected, and Pellerin had offered to meet him, assuring Honour that it was no trouble—indeed he had business of his own in Vieuxville, and could easily come a little earlier.

The lawyer said the first thing was to have the drawer in the manager's desk opened, and he ordered it done without scruple. Papers were found which looked ill for the absent man.

"If I find that he has been doing wrong, I will have him arrested," Honour said, giving way to her indignation when she saw by the glance the two gentlemen exchanged, after turning

over a few of the documents, that they feared the worst.

Several days passed; any hope that De Vieuxville might appear and by his presence refute the charge of deliberate villainy which hung over his head, was gone.

Before going back to Paris, Monsieur Besselère entered into a thorough examination of Honour's affairs, and the result proved very unfavourable. The business was in a bad state. Many things it was impossible to understand; no one but the manager could have thrown any light thereupon.

De Vieuxville had evidently plunged into wild speculations, in the hope of realizing large sums; his plans had failed. Finding it impossible to go on longer, he had fled before his guilt could be discovered, taking money with him too, it seemed certain, since an investigation of the books proved that tolerably large sums had been paid in of which no trace could be found.

To add to Honour's perplexities, the news she received from New York only told of fresh disasters. The terrible commercial crisis, the beginning of which crippled her, instead of mending, as had for a time been hoped, had gone from bad to worse, sweeping across the

Atlantic, and threatening the market of London.

Information came to Honour that, far from the company which held so large a share of her fortune being able to pay any dividends within the period they had set, it was most probable their misfortunes would end in utter bankruptcy.

The utmost confusion and terror reigned in all business circles both in England and America. A sure passport to Paradise would not have been much more difficult to obtain than money on any terms, and Honour had little to offer.

In the mean time the factory could not be allowed to lie idle, not only on account of the number of poor men who would be thrown out of employment, but the beet-root contracted for with the farmers must be worked up. There was money to advance also; Honour saw the heavy loan she had effected in the summer fade rapidly under the demands upon her.

Where to look for help she did not know. If the payments she had counted on from the American company failed to reach her before the period when the mortgage upon the Works expired, she should literally be unable to pay the interest on a renewal thereof.

If not menaced by actual ruin, she risked being so heavily encumbered that when her liabilities were settled she would be the possessor of little beyond a competency, at least for years. And all her philanthropic schemes —the trouble in which she might involve others! It seemed to Honour that nothing prevented her going mad, save the absolute necessity of holding reason fast for the sake of those who depended upon her.

Beyond and above these cares and anxieties, terrible as they were, there was a purely personal pang, intolerable to bear. She could not even be angry with the man whom she had trusted, and who had repaid her confidence by such cold-blooded treachery. She pitied him! She recognized this fact; revile and despise her own weakness as she might, she pitied him, grieved over his downfall. His character had possessed such noble possibilities; his intellect showed so clear and strong, that it was terrible to think of his having employed it only to work evil, sunk it to so common, petty a level of crime—jeopardizing the property of his employer to benefit himself —a scheme worthy only an ignorant or a small-minded rogue.

She pitied, and knew that she had really

loved, this man; the very strait into which he had brought himself and her showed her the whole truth at last—clearly, plainly—there was no escape therefrom! Not only that she had loved him—she loved him still! This was the hardest to bear; her self-loathing and contempt denuded life of its latest trace of dignity.

There was nothing whatever for her to do now that she had consulted the *avocat*. The overseers were competent to carry on the Works; there was money for present demands, and those of months to come; she was not obliged to think about the business after having completed all necessary arrangements, and now rest was imperative; heart and brain had been so overtasked that she could endure no more.

For two days she denied herself to everybody; even Monsieur Pellerin, who seemed somehow turned into her confidential adviser, had not been admitted. She spent most of the time on her bed, or wandering aimlessly up and down her room; occupation of any kind was out of the question. What she had to do was, to grow accustomed to the shock which had befallen her. She thought more than once that her sensations must resemble those of a

person beginning to recover consciousness after having been struck by lightning.

The faithful Céline attended to her wants in a quiet, unobtrusive manner, and fortunately a severe neuralgic attack confined Mrs. Somers to her chamber, so that Honour was not obliged to suffer any species of pin-pricks to add to her misery.

Naturally the neighbourhood was full of the wildest reports, each more improbable than another, the one most generally believed being that Mrs. Pemberton had become insane, and was confined under the charge of a keeper till she could safely be removed to a private lunatic asylum.

CHAPTER XII.

DR. JEAN COMES BACK.

In the midst of the general excitement, Jean Chegary arrived at Monsieur Galais' house. His coming took both the old gentleman and Gracieuse by surprise, as he had not written to announce his intention.

Monsieur Galais was in his room occupying himself,—more to put thoughts of the recent catastrophe aside than because he felt interest in his employment,—with what had been a favourite and secret pleasure for years—the linking together and tracing to their source the varied legends of Normandy. The work would never come to anything, and, perhaps, deep in his heart he knew it; all the same he liked to grow enthusiastic over his task, and it had filled up nearly every idle hour he could find since he first began collecting his materials.

Gracieuse was lying down on the sofa in the pretty little *salon*, when Manette clattered madly in upon her *sabots*, shouting,—

"God news, my child, good news! Dr. Jean has come!"

If the earth could have opened and swallowed her—if she could have fallen dead before there was time for him to traverse the entrance-hall — Gracieuse would have felt it the one sign of mercy Heaven could show. But after that first wild thought, she found somewhere the marvellous self-control which probably only one human being would have believed she possessed; rose from the couch, folded her shawl about her, and moved forward as her cousin reached the threshold.

"Gracieuse, I have come back," he said. "I hope you have a welcome for me."

"I am very glad indeed to see you, Jean," she said, calmly enough, calling up a smile too. "Manette, tell papa."

She let him take her hand and lead her back to the sofa; let him hold it while he talked in the eager, broken way one does when one first sees love or friend after an absence.

Before there was time for anything beyond an exchange of a few hurried sentences, Monsieur Galais came in, exclaiming,—

"Jean, my dear boy, welcome back! I never had so pleasant a surprise in my life!"

The two men embraced, French fashion, while Gracieuse sat watching them with a strange, inexplicable look on her face; and Manette, peering in from the hall, knocked the heels of her *sabots* together as an expression of delight.

"But the room is like a dungeon!" continued Monsieur Galais, after he had released Jean, and blown his nose as an excuse for using his pocket-handkerchief. "Bless my soul, Gracieuse, my darling, I can just make you out in your dark corner—you look like a ghost in this light, or darkness rather."

Dr. Jean moved to the window, and pulled up the blind; the warm, pleasant radiance of the autumn afternoon streamed into the apartment, and illuminated Gracieuse's face and figure. A vivid scarlet had mounted to her cheeks; her eyes blazed like diamonds.

"Does she not look well, Jean?" cried the old man, gazing at her with loving admiration. "I thought her pale the other day, but it is gone."

"Cousin Jean must be starved," Gracieuse said; "I think it would be better for me to see what Manette can give him to eat, instead of sitting here to listen to your compliments, you foolish old papa, you!"

As he seated himself on the sofa she rose, pushed his head back with one hand, and kissed his forehead, then left the room, Chegary's eyes following her all the while.

"Oh, Jean, my boy! if I could only tell you how glad I am to see you again!" cried Monsieur Galais. "Come and sit down beside me, I want to feel that you are really here."

Dr. Jean obeyed, talking pleasantly—rather faster than ordinary, his uncle might have noticed, had he not been too much excited—but his brown face looked tired and pale.

"And I think this time," he continued, with a more cheerful laugh than he had given for days, "I think *la petite* is as glad as I."

Dr. Jean patted the hand he held between his—he meant it for an answer, no doubt—at least, he gave no other.

"But what is this they told me at the station?" he asked suddenly. "What is the trouble at Madame Pemberton's sugar factory? It seems that man De Vieuxville has run away with the money—"

"No, no!" Monsieur Galais broke in; "don't believe it; I will not! We shall see him back. It will all be cleared up—trust me, it will, Jean! Why, if I were not certain of

it, this business would have killed me. But I am sure—I *am*, Jean!"

Chegary let one hand drop to his side; the other still caressed his uncle's, but its fellow, unseen by the old man, clenched itself over the edge of the sofa in a hard, relentless gripe, as if it grasped some noxious, sentient creature therein, and would never loose its hold till it had squeezed the last gasp of life from the reptile's body. Presently Manette appeared at the door, her wrinkled face scarlet with exertion, to announce that luncheon was ready for Dr. Jean. She knew he would excuse its meagreness, for she had not wished to keep him waiting; and, all the while, her heart was swelling with pride at the repast she had been able to prepare, in less time, as she remarked to her subservient lord and master, than any other woman would have required "to pare a potato."

If neither Gracieuse nor Dr. Jean talked much as they sat at table, the old gentleman made amends. He observed their taciturnity, but set it down to the score of mutual self-consciousness, and was hugely delighted at his discovery.

This was apparently to be chronicled as a day of surprises, for, before the end of the

meal, Manette rushed in, nearly out of her senses, exclaiming that Mademoiselle de Hauteville's chariot had just stopped at the gate, and that Mademoiselle herself was seated therein.

"She is passing the gate, you mean, I suppose," returned Monsieur Galais; "there is nothing so surprising in that, is there?"

"What I see, I see!" cried Manette, with the air of an offended oracle. "At this moment the footman of Mademoiselle is coming up the path—*là!* Monsieur can look for himself! And a pretty figure I am to open the door, and that stupid old Mathieu is flat on his back in the kitchen, tripped up by that accursed wooden leg, and cannot do it."

"Then I will—be tranquil, my good soul," said Monsieur, laughing.

At Manette's announcement, Gracieuse had half risen from her seat, then sank back into it, so deathly white that each instant Dr. Jean expected to see her faint. Monsieur Galais and Manette left the room, the former to open the door to Mademoiselle's retainer, the latter to get rid of her excitement by hastening in search of Mathieu, the wig, and the wooden leg, with sinister designs upon all three.

"Let me give you a glass of water," Jean said to his cousin, as the door closed.

"No; I don't want it—there is nothing the matter," she answered, steadily. "I am nervous now-a-days, that is all."

But unconsciously, in spite of the composure with which she managed to speak, she added a gesture of such pathetic entreaty that Chegary could not bring himself to trouble her by another word. He walked to the window, and stood looking out through the parted curtains, apparently engrossed in regarding old Mademoiselle seated in her chariot, both she and her vehicle looking as if they had driven straight out of the depths of bygone centuries.

Monsieur Galais opened the hall-door, and met Mademoiselle's aged servant on the threshold.

"My mistress begs you to do her the favour to come out and speak to her, sir," the man said.

"Yes—yes—of course," the old gentleman replied, too full of the pleasant thoughts Jean's arrival had roused even to wonder at this unprecedented act of condescension on the part of the great lady. "Perhaps you would give me my stick, and help me on with my great coat. I am a little afraid of the air,"—as he was, even in midsummer.

When she saw him coming down the path, Mademoiselle's patience could endure no more. She began making signs for him to hasten, and she was so fierce in her energy that a timid person might have hesitated to approach.

He reached the carriage. Before he could utter a syllable of greeting, she said imperatively,—

"I want to talk to you! Get in, get in! We will drive up and down the road."

To the utter astonishment of the household, even that of Gracieuse, who had been drawn to the window by an exclamation of surprise from Dr. Jean, Monsieur Galais was seen mounting into the chariot, and it drove slowly away.

"What I see, I see!" cried Manette to her husband, from their post of observation; "but only my own eyes could convince me of this."

"All the same, you do not understand," chuckled Mathieu. But the chuckle was speedily changed into a moan, for Manette treated him to a vicious pinch.

"And I will do it again," she said, "if you insult me in that way. Go out of the kitchen, you, and your wig, and your wooden leg. Only let me see either of you here again till supper-time, that's all!"

It might have been three quarters of an hour before the chariot returned.

Monsieur Galais went back into the house, but the carriage still waited.

Gracieuse and Jean were both in the hall to receive him.

"My dear children," he said at once, "I can be of some service to Mademoiselle de Hauteville; and I am going away from home for a few days."

"Papa!" exclaimed Gracieuse, catching his arm. In an instant she added, quietly, "Your news is so astounding, that it frightened me. But I suppose there is nothing the matter?"

"Nothing whatever, little one. Mademoiselle owns some property in the outskirts of Havre. She is dissatisfied with certain things that have happened in its management. She is going there, and thinks I may be of use."

"But can you bear the fatigue?" questioned Dr. Jean, rather anxiously.

"My dear boy, the bare idea makes me feel ten years younger." It was only necessary to look at him to be certain of this. "Anything which occupies me just now is a blessing. As a physician, you must understand that. Your coming has done me good, but I am glad for a

little while to get away from this place. It is natural enough, eh?"

"Perfectly so," Dr. Jean answered, and a look of relief came into his eyes, as if the old man's words had roused some hopeful thought in his mind.

"I cannot aid Madame Pemberton," he continued; "and it is worse than death to sit here idle while these inquiries are going on. Are you satisfied, my Gracieuse?"

"Yes, papa," she said, simply.

"Then have Manette put me up a few things in a portmanteau. I am going to drive with Mademoiselle to Rouen, and there we shall take the train. Hasten, my child; we must not keep the lady waiting."

For an instant Gracieuse hesitated, as if some question rose to her lips, which she could with difficulty repress; but it was only for an instant. She went upstairs, calling to Manette, who stood, gaping and wide-eyed, in the kitchen door, to follow her.

"We shall hear from you, of course?" Doctor Jean said, as he and his uncle entered the *salon*.

"As soon as we arrive. It is possible that Mademoiselle's affairs may even take her further, but I thought it better not to say that

to Gracieuse, lest she should be alarmed. It is a great comfort to me, Jean, that you have come. I hardly know how I could have gone without that."

"You may be sure I shall do my best," Doctor Jean answered, lightly. "You will find us here quite safe when you get back."

He saw that his uncle did not wish to be questioned, and, with his usual delicacy, forbore to add another inquiry. Very soon Gracieuse came back, wrapped her father up for his journey; and presently Manette appeared, carrying the portmanteau, so elated at the idea of her master's being called forth on business for the "great Mademoiselle," that it seemed to her a whole eternity before evening would permit her freedom to sally out in search of her gossips in order to communicate the wonderful tidings.

The same restraint was visible in Gracieuse's manner as she uttered her farewells to her father, affectionate as they were. Doctor Jean saw plainly that she was afraid to give way in the least, lest she should lose her last shred of self-control. She did not go out to the carriage, and the old gentleman, knowing that, like most people, she had a wholesome awe of "*la grande demoiselle*," was not surprised

thereat. Doctor Jean accompanied his uncle, embraced him, helped him into the carriage, and was noticed by Mademoiselle with a form of graciousness peculiarly her own.

"That is your nephew, Monsieur Galais?" she boomed, in a voice as terrific as if she had been accusing both men of arson, murder, and several other similar small peccadilloes of a similar nature. "How do you do, young doctor? I am glad to see you. (Is the portmanteau on, Pontieu?) You look like an honest man, and that is a very rare animal, sir, very rare. Are you safe in, Monsieur Galais? Then drive on, you stupid Antoine. Do you think we want to spend the day here making grimaces at Doctor Jean Chegary?"

And away the chariot rumbled, Monsieur Galais looking back to wave a last adieu to his nephew, and kiss his hand to Gracieuse, who still stood in the doorway.

Before Jean reached the house she had disappeared. It was not long, however, before she came into the *salon* where he was sitting. She talked about his journey, their mutual relatives, the oddities of Mademoiselle, her astonishment at the lady's asking her father's company on this journey, any and every trifle which presented itself. Jean did

his part as well as he was able. He saw that it was the only way of showing her kindness.

Dinner was not a necessity to either, owing to the late hour at which they had partaken of Manette's bountiful impromptu meal; but they had supper early in the evening, with delicious coffee, to please Jean's southern palate, and a temptingly indigestible *galette* to gratify the taste he had acquired during his former visit in Normandy.

The two cousins spent the hours till bed-time together, but Gracieuse never for an instant allowed the conversation to stray beyond the most ordinary topics; indeed, Dr. Jean was ready to aid her in this; his bewilderment was so excessive, his pain so great, that he found a certain relief in thus keeping his thoughts down to the merest common-places.

Chegary passed the night in a sleepless vigil, striving to find some means by which he could aid the unfortunate girl. If he could only persuade her to confide in him; but he knew how difficult this would be, from the knowledge he had gained of her character; and besides, he felt that, during his first confused moments of trouble, he had betrayed his distress. Never in his life had he been more thankful

for anything than the chance which had taken her father away for a while; during their season of unrestrained intercourse he might find an opportunity of making her understand that she could count upon his devotion to any length.

Poor Jean, he had loved her so dearly and so long; had deemed her so much elevated above ordinary women in her innocence and purity, and now—now! He loved her still, but with the pitying tenderness he would have yet guarded for her had she been his sister. The dream which had brightened his youth and manhood, glorified his life of arduous toil, and cast so vivid a light over the future, was gone for ever—lost, dead! But his great pain—and he suffered as only a close, reticent nature can—did not render him bitter. He put his own anguish by; it did not matter; he could meet and bear that; existence might henceforth show poor and bald enough, but he must support it like a man. It was of Gracieuse he thought—of all that lay before her.

In the dead of the night poor Manette crept up to his chamber, and told him the stories which had spread so widely in regard to her young mistress. She neither did nor could believe—it was a lie—all a lie; and she begged

Chegary to confirm her belief, with such piteous insistence, that he knew doubt had forced itself upon her. She told him how, a few days before, at a public fair, Mathieu had been taunted by an enemy with his mistress's disgrace, and Mathieu had come home blood-stained from the battle which ensued. She had been forced to tell Gracieuse that he had drunk too deeply, and got into a quarrel. That she should have lived to slander her blessed husband! But she was ready to do that, and more—to die, if need be, for her darling girl! But what to do? She was only a helpless, ignorant old woman; Doctor Jean was a man, brave and strong; and he would be able to find means! Any day some careless or wicked tongue might reveal to the father what was said, and the mere telling would be his death-blow. And her very urgency only made poor Chegary feel still more his own impotency, though he tried to find some words of comfort with which to send the devoted creature away.

And while Chegary was passing his dismal watch, Honour Pemberton held a vigil as unquiet as his own.

A new trouble had overtaken her. In her first moments of excitement she had uttered,

before the lawyer and Pellerin, her determination, if the charges proved true, to have De Vieuxville arrested wherever he could be found.

She had put the case unreservedly into Monsieur Besselère's hands, and he was in no mood to show clemency. He blamed himself for having so implicitly trusted the defaulter, and encouraged Mrs. Pemberton in her blindness. Pellerin was at his side, urging him on, declaring, and with reason enough, that any faltering would be a crime, not only toward the mistress of the Works, but the numerous poor men and their families who must suffer if disaster befel her.

That very evening Céline had told her of a report current among the people at the Factory —told it, weeping bitterly; for, with the exception of Monsieur Galais, she remained the fugitive's most staunch, if not sole, adherent. It was said that it had been discovered the manager had sailed from Havre for England, and detectives had been put upon his track.

Honour nearly went wild with suffering. She did not know whether she even had the power now to stop such a step on Monsieur Besselère's part; at all events she was aware of the arguments by which she would be met in case

she attempted it. But, however just and right they might be, she could not sit still and allow that crowning disgrace to fall upon the man she had loved—did love—she would not palter with her own soul—did love! If he should be innocent! She fairly laughed at her own insanity in thinking such a thing possible, yet the idea haunted her.

But, innocent or guilty, she could not let him fall into the hands of the law. She would give up every penny of her fortune to settle matters—save any creature from suffering through her means—toil with her own hands, if need be; but, beyond the stings of his conscience, no punishment should come to the absent man.

To find where he was concealed—send him warning of what was in store—her thoughts sprang to that as they would have done had she been his wife or sister. She must save him—she would! The means—the way? Perhaps Gracieuse Galais knew how a message might reach him. She must go to her; the girl would listen when she told her errand; would believe that she meant honestly, since she did not ask a clue to his whereabouts, only begged that the warning should be sent.

The morning came; as early as she could,

without exciting attention—it seemed to her, in her misery, as if every step was watched—she took her way to Monsieur Galais' house.

Dr. Jean had changed his dress as soon as he heard Manette moving about, went downstairs, trying to look as much as possible like a man who had slept peacefully. Manette gave him his coffee; he strolled idly about the rooms and garden for an hour, but Gracieuse did not appear. The quiet, the measured pacing through the pretty apartments, tired him more than actual physical labour would have done, so he put on his hat and sallied out—at least a long tramp would steady his nerves somewhat before the interview which he must hold with his cousin, and which could not be deferred.

Without thinking which way he turned, he took the road that led toward the château, and found himself in the wood where he had told the story of his love to Gracieuse. He had hurried on so fast that he had not even noticed the route, till he saw the very bench on which they had sat; the break in the trees where she had walked up and down; the towers of the Vieuxville château rising above the stately oaks; the blue autumn sky overhead; the late birds eagerly discussing their southern flight;

every sight and sound so full of peace—and he standing there with his troubled heart, like a spirit of unrest that cast a shadow upon the scene.

He flung himself on the bench, and buried his face in his hands, sitting motionless for many minutes.

So it was that Honour saw him as she hurried along. She recognized him at a glance, and a new hope sprang up in her heart. She ran forward, exclaiming,—

"Dr. Jean! Dr. Jean! Thank God, you have come!"

CHAPTER XIII.

HER SECRET.

Honour went home, and Chegary returned to the house in search of his cousin. The information he had to give might pave the way to that personal confidence which would be the sole means of Gracieuse's putting it in his power to help her.

But when he reached the house, the only person he could find was Mathieu, who told him that Manette was absent upon some errand, and that Mademoiselle had gone out, too—where he did not know—he had been at work among the flower-beds on the lawn, and Mademoiselle had spoken to him as she passed, but that was all he could tell.

Every instant was precious; Dr. Jean could have shaken the stupid old man with satisfaction, or have deprived him of his wooden leg, after Manette's habit when exasperated, but as such proceeding would not in the least advance matters, he restrained the impulse.

It was possible that Gracieuse might have gone up to the schools, or to early mass at the little chapel; so he hastened in that direction. He came in sight of the infirmary and adjacent buildings, and mounted the hill upon which they stood.

Under a clump of trees by the road which Honour had made, an old peasant woman had established a booth, where she sold fruit and vegetables, Mrs. Pemberton, with her customary good nature, having allowed her the privilege. As Dr. Jean approached, he saw her standing behind her huge baskets in violent altercation with another female, whose back was toward him, but he recognized Manette's voice. The two women were evidently beside themselves with rage. Chegary heard the peasant say,—

"You need not put on airs with me, when everybody knows that your young mistress is the cast-off love of that villain De Vieuxville! Why does she not go and join him, and get away from among honest folk?"

Manette replied by a blow full in her enemy's face. Dr. Jean hurried forward—but he had no time to think of the combatants; he had seen Gracieuse approaching from the direction of the chapel. She was so near that she caught the words.

She uttered no sound; for an instant she swayed back and forth; stretched out her arms in a blind, instinctive effort to save herself, and, before her cousin could reach her, fell forward and lay senseless upon the ground.

The old peasant woman was as much horrified as Manette, and both began to shriek and dance, blame each other, utter insane excuses, and show themselves so much worse than helpless, that Doctor Jean ordered them to get out of sight and hearing, in tones which they did not venture to disobey.

He raised Gracieuse, placed her in the chair, and bathed her face with water from a carafe that he saw on the table. She came to her senses sooner than he expected; looked wonderingly about, then up into his face, and recognized him instantly. She remained quite still, neither speaking nor turning her eyes from his—he would have given his soul to read the secret hers held, if the knowledge would have enabled him to aid her!

"You must let me take you home," was all he said, speaking the words very quietly.

"Yes," she answered; "take me home."

He helped her up; passed his arm about her waist, and led her away. No further word was exchanged between them. She kept her

face turned aside; an occasional sob shook her frame, but he knew that she was not weeping.

Once in the house, she tried to escape; he detained her gently, but so firmly that she felt the uselessness of struggling. Still she did not speak, either to entreat or command. He drew her into the *salon*, shut the door, placed her on the sofa, and sat down too, keeping his arm about her. She looked at him now; looked at him with a smile which sent a chill to his soul, there was something so like the cunning of insanity therein.

"Let me go, Jean," she said, softly; "I will come back presently."

"Wait a little," he answered; "you must rest first, and besides, I want to talk to you."

"Let me go!" she repeated, with a sudden passion in her voice, while her eyes began to blaze. "I will not stop—I will not be questioned—I—"

"Hush, Gracieuse," he said, in the same gentle tone. His experience as a physician taught him that, for the moment at least, she was near the borders of delirium or madness; the surest, perhaps the only, way to preserve her senses, was to tell his errand bluntly. "Gracieuse," he continued, "do you know where Monsieur de Vieuxville is?"

He could feel her whole form stiffen and grow rigid; every remnant of strength, mental and physical, yet left her, was concentrated in an effort to control herself. She did not speak.

"Surely you can trust me," he said; "your friend—your brother! Gracieuse, if you know where he is, you must tell me—I want to save him from being arrested."

She uttered one long wailing cry, and let her head sink upon the arm of the sofa, fighting against the nervous spasm which threatened her.

"I mean to save him," he added, in the same tender, resolute voice; "and I shall do it; but you must help me."

"It is that wicked woman!" she exclaimed, through her shut teeth.

"No, Gracieuse; it was she who told me. Her lawyer has sent detectives - she wants to save him if she can. Tell me where I shall find him, Gracieuse."

For a few seconds the hysterical convulsion shook her with such force that speech was impossible. He did not release his hold; he kept whispering words of encouragement in her ear. Presently she grew quiet enough to listen and to speak.

"Trust me in every way," Jean said. "Dear Gracieuse, I must tell you—I know the truth—others will know it soon."

She drew herself upright so unexpectedly that she was able to get free.

"What do you dare to suspect?" she cried, so wild that she was past restraint, past the recollection of any need of secrecy. "Who dares to think evil of me any more than of another man's wife?"

"Wife?—you are married?" he exclaimed.

"I have told!" she groaned. "Oh my God, I have told!"

"Gracieuse, for your father's sake—for your child's sake!"

"Be still!" she exclaimed, springing to her feet, and standing before him, absolutely awful in her mad despair. "Nobody is of any consequence but him; and I have told—I have told!"

She dropped upon her knees, and buried her face in the cushions of the sofa.

"Of course, he comes first," Jean Chegary whispered, as he bent over her; "but we must think of them too. You must have proofs—"

She raised her face, and looked at him with wondering scorn.

"Proofs?" she repeated. "Could I not trust him?" Then suddenly she sank on the floor, huddled herself together, and sat still; face and eyes grew alike dead; every vestige of life seemed concentrated in the terrible moan: "I have lost him—I have lost him —by my own fault; and I cannot die —I cannot die! I thought I could save him; I only made him doubt me; and I cannot die!"

Her senses were fairly wandering now; the spasm increased to such violence that nothing could be done except take her upstairs, oblige her to lie down, and administer an opiate. Precious as time was, he must do this. She obeyed him implicitly; did not attempt to speak; clenched her hands over the edge of the bed to hold herself quiet; swallowed the draught he held to her lips, though it was with such difficulty she could open the shut teeth that he had to aid her, and lay there, Jean's arm supporting her always.

I think no human being ever kept a stranger watch, considering everything; but Doctor Jean scarcely thought of himself—his mind was full of her and the man he meant to save for her sake. His composure was something wonderful, feeling, as he did, that each instant of

delay endangered Gracieuse's life, because she would die if the worst overtook her husband; yet forced to let her rest, for, if he did not, she would be mad!

A whole hour passed! A little clock on the mantel counted the minutes in a sharp, irritating fashion, as if it had a satisfaction in piercing his ears with that metallic click, and warning him what a risk he ran either way; but he sat still.

Gracieuse did not positively fall asleep—he had guarded against this—but she sank into a kind of torpor, muttering unintelligibly, though it was evident she knew he sat by her side, and believed herself talking to him; and whenever she uttered his name in a tone of inquiry, as if to make sure he understood something she had said, he answered in a half whisper, which never failed to satisfy her.

The terrible sixty minutes—thank your God if the exigencies of this mortal life have never taught you what an endless hell of agony sixty minutes can hold—were over. The demon-haunted clock on the mantel chimed the hour. Gracieuse roused herself, as though the sound had struck a warning to her soul. She opened her eyes; he did not wait for her to grow agitated by trying to remember; he said, quickly,—

"You know I am going to Monsieur de Vieuxville! You have his address—tell me where to find him."

"You will save him?" she asked, in a voice of piteous entreaty, though the influence of the drug was still strong upon her. "Ah, save him, Jean! He has suffered so—he has suffered so!"

"Only do exactly as I wish, Gracieuse, and I will save him," Jean answered.

"Yes—just what you tell me—yes."

"Where is he? Have you it written?" he asked.

"Who said I had it written?" she gasped, with a faint return of her former violence; "who said—"

"Gracieuse, Gracieuse! It is Jean—your brother! Tell me where he is—I will save him. The address, Gracieuse—the place!"

"Ah!" she sighed, in a tone of relief; her head dropped back on her pillow; her eyes closed; she stretched out her hand, and motioned him to bend toward her. "I can tell it," she whispered, "it is burned in—burned in!"

"Tell, dear; tell! Let me go; it is for him, you know,—for him!"

She pulled him close to her, as if afraid some

other person might hear, and gave him the information, slowly, mechanically; there could be no danger of mistake—she had learned it by heart; or, as she herself expressed it, in her pitiful, wandering way—it had been burned in!

Doctor Jean had no fear in leaving her; he gave such directions to Manette as were necessary; left another draught, which would make Gracieuse sleep. He knew that on the morrow she would wake, weakened perhaps, but perfectly able to take care of herself.

He took time to leave a note for Manette to give her, telling her where he had gone, and what he meant to do, reminding her that she must write to her father, lest the old gentleman should be alarmed.

He wrote to Honour Pemberton also; packed his portmanteau in as orderly a way as if no care consumed him; reached Sainton in time for a train, and set forth upon his errand.

CHAPTER XIV.

COMING HOME.

The day after Monsieur Pellerin's *fête*, Léon de Marsan went up to Paris. The mental trouble of the past weeks had so increased his physical ailments that fresh advice was necessary, and an additional reason for his going was the fact that matters between him and his wife had reached a crisis which rendered home unendurable.

He began for the first time to contemplate the idea of a separation; yet he shrank from this extreme measure—not on account of any pain which he must endure—it would be impossible for him to suffer more than he did—but for Effie's sake. If he left her now, her reputation would be irredeemably ruined, and, culpable as she was, he could not bear to bring this disgrace upon her.

She had been successful in her rebellion; even at this pass, he could not reveal that she had gone to the *fête* against his positive com-

mands; and Honour herself, whom he saw once before his departure, believed Effie had told the truth when she declared that Léon desired her to make one among Monsieur Pellerin's guests.

To her husband, Madame de Marsan defended her conduct with her customary insulting defiance.

"You might have known that I should go," she said. "I cannot help your rendering us both ridiculous by your absurd conduct, but at least I shall not aid you. I am not afraid of you! Though you have offered me personal violence, and I know that my life is in danger, I am not afraid."

This had been a favourite taunt with her ever since the day she hurt her arm in flinging herself upon the floor, after refusing to leave his studio. She knew the assertion pained and angered him more than any other reproach she could employ, so she did not spare it.

And Léon took his misery away for a while from the home which had grown utterly unbearable. Some decision must be reached; he hoped that, during his absence, Effie might come to a better state of mind, if only from motives of personal prudence, and a care for her own reputation. But the truth was, she

trusted to his dread of scandal and his tenderness of heart to keep him from carrying into execution the threat he had for the first time uttered, of procuring a legal separation.

Léon remained some time in Paris, seeing only a few artist acquaintances, who knew nothing whatever about his social life, so he was not irritated in their companionship by the reflection that they were speculating upon the troubles between him and his wife, and either pitying or despising his weakness.

So it chanced that he had only met Arthur de Chantal once, and that in the street, and the young man had scarcely attempted a pretence of friendliness. He heard something of the reckless life the boy was leading, and pitied him sincerely; indeed, his judgment of Effie was harsher where this youth was concerned than upon her conduct toward himself. Arthur was neither mentally nor morally strong, and Effie had too much discernment of character not to have perceived this, and so known that in encouraging his insane passion for herself, and by her counsels increasing his impatience of his engagement, she had risked ruining every hope of his becoming a decent, respectable man almost as completely as she had his worldly prospects.

De Marsan went one night to his club — almost the first time he had set foot there. A sudden shower came on as he was passing the entrance, and he turned in for shelter, rather than from a desire to find society.

It was very late; scarcely any of the *salles*, except the card-rooms, had occupants. He walked up and down the long corridor for a while, thinking the dreary thoughts which now-a-days were his constant companions, sleeping or waking, wondering sadly over the future which shut down so dark and hopeless before his tired vision.

The sound of voices reached him from an adjacent billiard-room; an angry altercation was going on. Mechanically he pushed open the door and entered. There were not more than half-a-dozen men present—all persons whom he knew intimately enough to take rank under that much-abused name, friendship—and among them was Arthur de Chantal. It was his voice, and that of a youth about his own age which Léon had heard. They had been playing at billiards, and had got into a squabble over the game. Arthur was evidently intoxicated, or, worse than that, in the sort of insane state which days and nights of carousal and sleeplessness leave a man. Léon had been

fond of the young fellow from the time Arthur was a bold, frank, engaging boy—it was a shock to see him standing there with his haggard face and wild eyes—worst of all to remember how great a share of the blame lay at Effie's door.

De Marsan was warmly greeted; all the bystanders were glad to see him enter, hoping that he might possess sufficient influence over Arthur to restrain him from further intemperance of language and conduct. They began eagerly to explain the matter; even De Chantal's opponent, though somewhat excited by wine, and roused by Arthur's violence to a pitch of anger that nearly equalled his, regained reason enough to agree with the general verdict that De Marsan's judgment should be allowed to settle the matter in dispute.

Arthur stood sullenly by, and never spoke a word, while one of the group explained the affair, though Léon had gone up to him and laid his hand on his shoulder in friendly salutation, keeping it there as he listened to the recital of the discussion.

There could not be two opinions as to the point at issue; Arthur was plainly in the wrong, and Léon said so unhesitatingly, though putting his decision in as mild a fashion as possible.

De Chantal burst into a torrent of abuse, which Léon tried to check by kindly words, from very shame and pity for the disgrace the boy was bringing upon himself.

"He doesn't know what he is saying," somebody exclaimed; "he has not slept for nearly a week, and has lived principally on brandy and opium. Don't pay any attention, De Marsan."

"Most certainly I shall not," Léon replied; "I am only sorry—I think Arthur will be too, by to-morrow morning."

"Bah!" cried De Chantal, so beside himself with excitement that he staggered back and forth, and caught hold of the table for support; "I don't want any such friendliness from Monsieur de Marsan—I meant every word I said!"

"Just now you do, perhaps," returned Léon; "but you will not later."

"First you insult me by siding against me when you know I am right—now by treating me as if I were too childish to be noticed," cried De Chantal.

Léon did not answer; he was turning away. One of the elder men went up to Arthur, and began urging him to leave the place; to go to his lodgings and get to bed. De Chantal

pushed him aside, and put himself in front of Léon.

"The truth is, you are jealous of me on your wife's account—and everybody knows it!" he fairly shouted.

Without a word, with perfect composure (paradoxical as the word sounds when applied to such action), De Marsan knocked him down. Even at this moment, as he looked at Arthur prostrate on the floor, the feeling in his mind was pity rather than anger.

De Chantal raised himself; the fall had sobered him somewhat. He sprang forward; several men rushed in between. Of course everybody talked at once—De Marsan alone remaining silent.

"You 'll fight me!" Arthur cried.

"I shall not do you that honour," returned Léon, quietly. "I will horsewhip you if you open your lips again. You are drunk—mad. My wife is not to be insulted by my fighting a duel, as if the words of a crazy man deserved other notice than the punishment I have given you."

The bystanders agreed with De Marsan, and Arthur was at last persuaded to go away. Not a person there but knew the young man incapable of such a speech when sane, and in

spite of the weakness for duels inherent in Gallic nature, had sense enough to feel that any pursuance of the matter would damn Madame de Marsan; and they all liked both her and her husband.

Léon took his leave. He knew that, notwithstanding the evident intention of the whole group to keep the business quiet, rumours thereof were certain to leak out, and so add to the gossip which Effie had already brought upon herself. Then, too, if Arthur sent him a challenge, he doubted possessing sufficient moral courage to refuse it; yet, if he fought the young man, Effie would be ruined irrevocably.

But the next day brought no challenge. The persons who had witnessed the affair, several of them men whose age and social position rendered their verdict decisive, went to De Chantal, and told him frankly that such conduct on his part would be visited by unanimous condemnation. They were determined that Madame de Marsan should not suffer for his drunken insanity. The matter was to be hushed up—ignored—and he to bear the punishment he had received till an opportunity offered to fix a quarrel upon Léon on grounds entirely disconnected with the present difficulty.

In his disordered state of mind, Arthur's emotions were so wild a jumble, that he began almost to feel his friends were right in declaring him mad. Every honourable instinct of his nature rose in horror at his own disgraceful conduct; yet his rage against De Marsan was so intense, that he could scarcely restrain himself from rushing out at once and provoking Léon to an encounter so public that a duel could not be avoided.

On the second day he received a letter from Effie, which upset the final gleam of reason he had left. It was filled with exaggerated complaints of her husband—hints that she actually feared for her life. She was going away—going to England. She wrote this last letter to her one friend, the sole person to whom she had ever confided the woes which blighted her existence. He was to think kindly of her, to pity her, but to take up his career as if she were not.

The truth was Effie had begun to be frightened. Arthur's epistles were so insane, that, interesting as she found this tragic aspect of things, she wanted him to get his senses back, even to attempt a reconciliation with Mathilde Flandin.

Léon had not once written to her since his

departure—an ominous line of conduct, which filled her with apprehensions she had never felt before. She began to fear that she had pushed her rebellion too far, and that he might carry into execution his threat of leaving her, though, when he uttered it, she had believed it only an angry menace, which would have no result.

Then, too, the comparative isolation in which she had been left during her husband's absence warned her what the temper of the neighbourhood was in regard to her. No doubt her enemies had given Léon's journey a colouring by which they succeeded in prejudicing even her allies.

So she wrote her letter to Arthur. She really was going away at once. It was on a Tuesday morning that she wrote. She had just received an inexplicably-delayed English letter, telling her that Mayne was very ill; "at death's door" the grandmother phrased it, finding, even in the midst of her own great distress, a grim satisfaction in troubling Effie. And the letter was dated nearly a fortnight back. Effie was positively overwhelmed with despair. Her affection for Mayne was probably the most genuine feeling she had ever known.

But even in her sore anxiety she could be glad of any excuse for leaving the neighbourhood awhile. She told her servants the news, left a note for Léon, and took the first train to Dieppe, as this port was so near that, in spite of the length of the voyage, she would reach her destination more quickly than by any other route.

On Wednesday De Marsan returned home, and found her gone. She had not chosen to leave her grandmother's harsh epistle for his perusal, and of late she had told him so many downright falsehoods, that he could by no means feel sure her report of Mayne's state was strictly true. No doubt it held some foundation of truth, but her letter was calculated to make him believe that she had seized upon her cousin's illness as a pretext. She was going to her relatives, she said; duty called her, and she regarded it, too, as a special interposition in her own behalf. Unless extraneous reasons had called her away, nothing would have induced her to leave her home, though she knew that her life was in danger there; but, once gone, she should not return until her husband (she employed the word only because the law gave him the title, he having forfeited it in her eyes, and in the

sight of heaven) had so far repented his vile conduct, his base suspicions, his cowardly wickedness, that he could acknowledge himself from first to last completely in the wrong.

Now, as I have so lately declared that Effie had begun to be alarmed lest Léon should carry out his threat of a separation, there may perhaps be those who will pronounce it unnatural to describe her writing such a letter to her husband. But Effie regarded the matter from a standpoint which satisfied her she was best serving her cause by carefully hiding any willingness to yield.

Léon loved her—loved her with his whole heart and soul. He might be so angry that in his passion he would actually contemplate a permanent rupture; but he loved her, and this declaration on her part, this coming back to find his home deserted, would bring him to his senses—prove how boundless her power, how impossible for him to support life without her presence, how incapable he was of fulfilling his wild threat to leave her.

And, to a certain extent, she counted rightly upon the might of his love. While absent, he had been able to persevere in that bitter, disdainful wrath—to see clearly that further tolerance of her rebellion would be unworthy

any man; but it was not so easy when he sat once more in his solitary house. He loved her so entirely—I go back always to that reason; for, whatever weakness or madness it may include, it must always remain the strongest motive which can influence a human being.

But he had no mind to go in search of her; she had believed he would follow—that he would not do. He had no intention even of writing to her at present, though, at the end of the first two hours passed under his own roof, he had reached the conclusion to which Effie had been certain he would come — he could not separate from her—yet.

Effie, in her arrogant confidence, did not include this particle in her thoughts; she believed loneliness would bring back his potent love with such force, that he would unreservedly yield to its entreaties for a reconciliation. This was her one mistake; he had suffered so much and so long that he was able, in certain ways, in spite of his misery, to regard the matter from a view as dispassionate as he might have done in the case of another.

There arrives sometimes a crisis in life when to root out love becomes as inevitable as the amputation of a limb hopelessly diseased, or the removal of an internal tumor. Gangrene

and death would be the physical result of hesitation; moral debasement, and worse than death of the soul, the result in the other case. And Léon de Marsan knew that he had reached this pass. But a hope still remained: the horrible operation might be rendered unnecessary; this would depend upon Effie herself. He did not desire that she should put her penitence into words; he had no wish in any way to humiliate her: all she had to do was to return; to show by her conduct that, whether or not she considered herself wrong in the individual instances, she meant to relinquish for ever the reckless, sinful searching after admiration, and subdue the demon of coquetry which had lured her into paths so dangerous and so noisome.

Absolute repose, mental and bodily, was of paramount necessity to him; the doctors had announced this with a frankness which amounted to declaring that in such rest lay his one chance of recovery, or even of prolonging his life. He might stop work, though what to do with his unemployed hours he hardly knew; and then, too, it seemed so cruel that just at this period of his career he should be condemned to inaction: but where was he to turn for the panacea which should give quiet to his mind?

As he sat in his studio, mechanically holding Effie's letter in his hand, lost in a meditation as dreary as could easily fall to the lot of any human being, the door opened, and old Madame de Chantal entered, unannounced. It needed only one glance to show him that she was the bearer of evil tidings. Her dress, always so scrupulously dainty in its neatness, was disordered and covered with dust; her features set in the hard, rigid lines intense suffering brings into the face of old age.

She closed the door behind her, advanced a few steps, and looked about. The strange pang which shot across his heart rendered Léon incapable of movement; he could only sit still and watch her as she peered about the shadowy room. Then her eyes fell upon him; a dim glow brightened their anguish, and she cried out sharply,—

"Are you satisfied? My boy is ruined utterly at last, and here you sit doing nothing! If you did want to get rid of your wicked wife, you might have spared my Arthur! I don't know what harm he had done you, that you should have let him come to this."

Léon tried to speak; his lips had suddenly grown so dry and parched that he could frame no words; only some inarticulate sounds,

like the moans of a dumb animal, escaped them.

"I can't hear you!" exclaimed Madame, in the same piteously fretful tone. "Are you crying?—are you cursing? I am too old to cry; but I curse you—yes, I do—you and her—both! You have ruined my Arthur, between you, for this world and the next—oh, my boy, my boy!"

Through the terrible physical agony which mounted from heart to brain, and rendered any effort to think collectedly impossible, Léon was conscious of a dull wonder if the mad young fellow could have committed suicide, under the shame which had fallen upon him.

"Don't you hear what I am saying?" cried Madame, feebly putting out her hands, in the aimless way a blind person would, and clasping them hard over the back of a chair. "Can't you hear?"

He knew now that she had been speaking all the while he was busy with the horror of that dread which had started up in his soul; but he had not heard a word she uttered.

"No, I did not hear!" he answered, in a voice which sounded almost as aged and sharp as hers. "Sit down, do."

"I'll not sit in this house—there is a curse

on it!" she cried. "Oh, my boy—my Arthur! Your fault and hers; and there you sit like a stone image—doing nothing! Have you no blood in your veins?—are you an utter coward?"

"I don't know what has happened. Try to tell so that I can understand! Don't shake and scream like that," he said, with a sort of surprise in his confused mind that she could not feel how her agitation hurt him.

"There is no good of whispering: it is one of those secrets all the world knows!" she exclaimed. "Oh, my boy—my boy!"

He shook off the weakness caused by that intolerable pain; he was ashamed even for an instant to have yielded to it when this poor woman had come to him in her trouble. He rose from his chair, and moved toward her, saying,—

"What is it—what is it? Curse me if you will; but tell me is there anything I can do?"

"Do?" she repeated. "Now that it is too late, he talks like this! Don't you understand what has happened? I was afraid you would have followed before I could get here; but there you sit—you sit! Where is your wife, you Léon de Marsan?—answer me that!"

"Gone to England," he replied, more than

ever convinced some horrible fate had befallen Arthur, and that, in the first frenzy of her despair, the poor mother had come hither to denounce the woman she considered her son's Nemesis.

"Gone to England!—oh, you fool! And my boy—where is he?" she cried.

"I do not know."

"Gone with her—gone with your wife! Now can you understand?" she broke in.

"It is a lie!" he exclaimed. "Her cousin is ill—she has gone to him. No matter who trumped up that story to frighten you, it is a lie."

He was close to her now. Apparently thinking that he meant to leave the room, she caught his arm with both hands, crying,—

"You shall not go—you shall not go! My boy—promise not to harm my boy? Why should you care for her?—let her go—the fiend! the wanton! Oh, Léon de Marsan, as you hope for mercy hereafter, spare my boy!"

"Don't I tell you it is false?" he retorted, angrily. "Try and get your senses steady and listen."

"It is true," she groaned, still holding him in that convulsive gripe, though she tottered feebly back and forth. "I did not believe it;

but Martin saw them—he had just come from Dieppe. I was afraid you would be gone! Oh, you shall not go!—my boy shall not be murdered!"

He tried to release himself from her hold; she sank upon the floor, clinging to his knees and moaning,—

"My boy, my boy! You shall not—I'll curse you! and, oh, his mother's curse will damn you as utterly as her! For God's sake—mercy—mercy—promise—oh, my boy—my boy!"

He raised her by main force, and put her in a chair—held her there when she tried to rise.

"You must listen," he said. "I am not going away! I do not believe the story: no matter who saw—I do not believe it!"

She looked up into his face with eyes of such horrified certainty that, even as he uttered the denial, a conviction of the truth thrust itself upon him. He staggered back into a chair opposite hers; the two sat for a few instants staring into each other's face, incapable of speech or movement.

"Try to tell me," he said. "I know it is not true—but tell."

"And my boy—oh, you shall promise."

"Be still!" he interrupted. "What do I

care about your boy—he or another—what would the man be to me? It is not true, I say! Tell me the story straight out, or I 'll leave you with it untold!"

Again she caught his arm in her trembling hands; but she told the tale—told it steadily enough, save that now and then she broke off with wild pleas for her boy—her boy.

This was what she had learned. She had gone up to Paris on the previous afternoon, in search of Arthur, unable longer to support the estrangement between them without making another effort to recover her son. She did not even know where he lodged; it was not till this very morning she learned, and then he had gone—had left town the evening before—in great haste, his *concierge* said—carrying most of his luggage with him. It occurred to the mother that he might have set out for home, perhaps animated by the same feeling which had prompted her to come in pursuit of him. She started on her return by the noon mail. At Rouen she was obliged to stop, for the train on the branch line was not ready. While she was waiting, the express from Dieppe for Paris came in, and halted half-an-hour, owing to some trouble in regard to an engine. A gentleman descended whom she knew by sight;

he met a friend on the platform; without either of them being aware that she overheard, she caught their whole conversation; learned that he had seen Madame de Marsan and her son at the port; according to him they were in a boat, on their way toward a steamer bound for Lisbon, another boat following with their luggage.

Her first idea had been to go to Dieppe; then she was met by an old servant of hers, who had also come up in the train. He confirmed the story she had heard, but he persuaded her to return home. In her frenzy she seized upon the idea of seeking De Marsan to keep him from harming her boy—following him, dogging his footsteps—all the time beset by an insane feeling that she should find Effie in her our house.

Whether the story were true or not—and it seemed probable that it was—his wife's reputation was ruined for ever. It might be that she had not intended to elope with Arthur; that she had allowed him to meet her there; that—but it was useless to speculate. His physical pain was so great he found it difficult to think at all; still at intervals he could hear Madame de Chantal's voice. He sat down at a table, and wrote a few lines.

"What are you doing?" she called.

"Sending a telegram to England, to know if my—if Madame de Marsan arrived by the Newhaven boat," he replied.

"And—and—"

"I shall not stir till I receive an answer."

"You want to get rid of me!" she cried. "I will not go: you shall not stir a foot without my following you."

"Stay or go, as you please," he said, wearily.

He rang the bell, gave the despatch to a servant, and ordered it to be sent at once. Madame de Chantal sat watching him.

"I wish at least you would leave me alone," he said, in the same tired voice. "You will find the *salon* more comfortable. I cannot get off without your seeing me."

She went away, closing the door behind her; he sat solitary among the shadows. At last the mother could bear the suspense no longer. Why had she not gone on to warn Arthur? She was mad—idiotic! She could do it yet, if the steamer for Lisbon had not sailed. She hurried out of the house, got into her carriage, and drove to the station in time to catch a train for Dieppe.

An hour passed—another. It was almost twilight; the messenger had not returned.

Still Léon did not stir; he sat motionless in the chair into which he had dropped when Madame de Chantal left the room.

There had been a violent storm during the previous night; the wind had risen again; the rain was beginning to fall; the tempest threatened to be as severe as on the preceding evening; but he heeded neither the strife of the elements nor the gathering darkness; there he sat, silent and immovable, among the shadows.

CHAPTER XV.

IT IS TOLD.

In the gathering gloom of that stormy twilight, Gracieuse Galais also sat alone in her desolate home, crushed under a weight of misery blacker than that which confronted the man whom Madame de Chantal had left. In her case, no lingering possibility existed that might show like a gleam of hope; not the torture of suspense, which sometimes, after the blow falls, we discover, brought a strength born out of the uncertainty, wherewith we were enabled to bear.

No hope, not even the restless boon of doubt, remained to the solitary girl. Her husband was dead—the tidings had been flung in upon her suddenly on the previous night, as we read of such news being cast into a prisoner's dungeon by his tormentors—just the bare fact, unrelieved by so much as a pitying word.

Dead! The night had passed; the day had dragged by; the endless hours had made her

so familiar with her despair, that she could not force her mind back to a period when that despair had not existed. Dead—that was all she knew! Never in this world to hear his lips pronounce pardon; never to learn if in his last moments he loved her, thought of her longed for her presence, strove to send forth from his soul to hers some message which she could cling to and remember, though it might be only as she would have gazed at an epitaph graven upon his tomb.

Dead, and their secret had died with him; at least now he could never be harmed by its utterance. She was not thinking of herself; she did not recollect that she held no proofs of her marriage—that she was utterly powerless to obtain such. She only regarded the matter as connected with her dead husband; no harm could come to him.

It had taken the whole night and day for her to reach so much reflection as this. Before, she had only been able to remember that he was dead—dead; and she should never know if he loved her at the last—if he had forgiven her.

But with this new thought started up the consciousness of what remained for her to do. She had still one task to perform, and she

must fulfil it. After that, life would end; great as her sin was, God would show her this mercy—life would end.

She had neither eaten nor slept; the food Manette had brought stood untouched on the table; the old woman, hurt or offended by her obstinate refusal to speak or look up, had ceased to trouble her by appearing at the door; she had been alone for hours.

Now she rose to go out; searched wearily for a shawl to wrap about her shoulders, so dazed and confused that she had to hunt as if the familiar room had been a stranger's.

She stumbled and staggered from weakness; hurt herself several times against some article of furniture; wondering, in a dull fashion, that the physical pain could make itself felt. She saw the food, and tried to eat, remembering that, if her strength were to give way before her walk ended, she might fall by the road-side, and die without having done her work. She ate a morsel of bread; it choked her to swallow, but she persevered. Suddenly a strange craving seized her; the second life which she carried in her bosom was so strong that it forced its need of nourishment upon her, and she devoured greedily every morsel, and drank the wine.

Then she went forth into the twilight. The rain was falling heavily, and her garments were speedily drenched, but she did not know it. She walked steadily on, up the road toward the château of Vieuxville, meeting no one, or if so, quite unconscious of the fact. She neither faltered nor halted but once; that was when she came to the place from whence the roof of the pavilion was visible among the trees in the park. Then she tottered, and would have fallen; but luckily she was close to a stone cross, which stood by the roadside, and she clung to that, shutting her eyes, shivering from head to foot, because for such as she even to touch the blessed symbol seemed an added sin. She remembered—always in the same dull way, rather as if some person suggested the thought than that it roused itself in her own mind—the scene in 'Faust,' where Marguerite sinks at the base of the cross beside the church, and hears the tones of the organ and the voices of the village choir peal forth from within; Marguerite cast out, accursed, like her—like her!

The autumn wind moaned dismally in her ears; the rain beat against her. She noticed both now. They seemed like reproaches and insults, meant to crush her latest

strength and leave her unable to fulfil her errand.

She struggled up from her knees, and plodded on, not daring to raise her head till she was far past the pavilion. She reached the great gates. They were ajar. The lodge-keeper and her children were within doors, gathered about their hearth, where a fire burned brightly. She could see the gleam of the blaze, hear the happy childish voices, see and hear, with a whole world of purgatorial misery stretching between her and such peace.

She passed on up the avenue. Near the house she turned to the left, toward the terrace which ran below the windows of the library. The last time she had stood here was the night of Honour's ball, when, insane with jealousy, she had wandered away to the mansion to torment herself by the sight of her husband gay and happy; he unsuspicious of the secret which had just forced itself upon her, adding to her troubles by its warning that concealment would only be possible a few months longer,—the secret which, even in her jealous pain, she had guarded from him, because she could not bring herself to increase his cares while she could bear this new burden alone.

She mounted the steps, and peered in at one of the glass doors. Honour Pemberton was seated in the library. She had been trying to occupy herself with a book till the waning light forced her to relinquish the volume, from which her thoughts had already strayed.

During the last two days she had hoped that each hour would bring news of Chegary, but none had reached her. Immediately after her interview with him, she sent a messenger to Paris with a letter for Monsieur Besselère. The lawyer, in his answer, assured her that he had taken no steps toward arresting De Vieuxville—would not do so without consulting her. He had instituted inquiries as to the manager's whereabouts, in order that he might be ready to perform his part if she decided to push the affair to the fullest limit of the law,—that was all. How any knowledge of his plans had spread abroad he could not tell. It was impossible to suspect Monsieur Pellerin, who had proved himself so kind and efficient since the commencement of the unfortunate business; so it must have transpired through the carelessness of some one of the officials whom he had been obliged to trust.

But no further message had come from the lawyer, and no news from Jean Chegary.

Since assured of the personal safety of the absent man, Honour had, in a measure, gone back to her first harsh, angry thoughts. She blamed herself for her weakness more severely than another could have done; still she clung to her resolution that no harm should overtake him through her agency.

Each hour her mental conflict had grown stronger, each hour her self-contempt had increased; but she never wavered in her determination.

Suddenly, as she sat there lost in gloomy meditation, she heard her name pronounced, looked up, and saw what appeared like the ghost of Gracieuse Galais standing on the terrace. She rose and tried to open the glass door. Her hands trembled so that for some seconds she could not succeed in turning the handle. She could see Gracieuse's dead eyes fixed upon her, hear her voice calling,—

"Let me in! let me in! I have come to tell you the truth at last—at last!"

Honour got the sash open, and tried to draw her into the room, but Gracieuse shrank back, moaning,—

"Don't touch me—don't!"

"Gracieuse! Gracieuse!" exclaimed Honour, in pain and terror.

"Yes, yes, I'll tell you! Wait a minute! I'll tell," she returned, moving forward and dropping into a chair.

Honour closed the window and hurried toward her. Without a word she took off her wet shawl, and wrapped about her a mantle that chanced to be lying on a sofa.

"You are wet. You ought not to have come out in this rain," she said, trying for some commonplace words, as it is so natural to do in the presence of such anguish as she read in Gracieuse's face, hoping thus to bring her a little composure.

"Don't touch me—don't be kind to me!" groaned the girl. "You do not know—but I must tell! He is dead now—it cannot harm him—he is dead."

Honour stood staring at her with a sudden sick, faint sensation of horror. De Vieuxville dead—and even during this past hour she had been following his spirit with harsh, angry thoughts! She sank into a chair opposite, her face almost as white and drawn as Gracieuse's own. Through the confusion of her thoughts came the recollection of that happy half-hour on the night of her ball when he had kissed her hand—when her heart had fluttered like a shy bird beneath the revealings of his eyes!

Such a dreadful night swept between her and that moment!

"It cannot be!" she cried, scarcely knowing that she spoke aloud. "It cannot be!"

"He is dead," repeated Gracieuse; "my husband is dead!"

Honour caught the word "husband"; it roused a new reflection in her mind. At least he had not been guilty toward this poor girl: she had wronged him there—perhaps in other things also; and she should have to learn the truth now that it was too late for her to atone.

She remained silent for a little, unable to find words. Gracieuse had leaned forward in her chair, her hands resting on her knees and supporting her head. A carriage drove up, and stopped before the house, unheard by either. Suddenly the door opened; Gracieuse did not move. Honour turned her head to bid the intruder withdraw, and saw Monsieur de Vieuxville standing on the threshold, and behind him Jean Chegary. They advanced into the room, and Honour heard the Marquis say,—

"Madame Pemberton, you wished to have me arrested. I am here! You will be right enough to do it, for though I have come back, I am powerless to prove my innocence."

Honour could not think of him or his words —only of Gracieuse. The girl had sunk back in her chair; her eyes were closed; her face so death-like that Honour's first thought was that the joy of seeing him alive had killed her. She cried out: Jean Chegary hurried forward.

"He is here, Gracieuse!" cried Honour. "It was all a horrible mistake! He is alive, Gracieuse! Oh, Monsieur de Vieuxville, speak to her: she has suffered so—she thought you were dead."

"Gracieuse!" exclaimed the Marquis, in a tone of wonder and alarm.

"Yes, I hear you," she murmured. "I am going to tell—wait—he is dead, you know—he is dead."

"Her mind is wandering," whispered Honour, in terror. "Oh, Dr. Jean, what can we do?"

"No, no," returned he, in the same tone; "it was not De Vieuxville—don't you understand?"

Honour stared at him, speechless, stunned.

Gracieuse's lips moved, but no sound was audible.

"Do you hear?" she cried aloud, at last.

"Wait a little, Gracieuse," Dr. Jean said, gently. "You cannot tell us yet."

"I must," she said; "I must! I did it all! I can tell—it cannot harm him now. Oh, Gerard, Gerard! He would have been ruined if the truth had come out. Pellerin knew; he was in England when we were married. He threatened to tell if I did not obey him. I kept it all from Gerard. There was more!"

She put her hands to her head in a piteous effort to collect her thoughts.

"Rest a little, Gracieuse," whispered Honour, bending over her.

"No, no; I cannot rest! Wait—he had that paper Gerard had given—no, I need not tell about that!" Then she broke off, crying piteously,—"Ah, help me somebody—only a word!"

"You wanted to tell us what that man forced you to do against Monsieur de Vieuxville," Jean Chegary said, in a slow, difficult voice.

"Yes—that was it! I stole the telegrams for him to see before they reached Monsieur." She was looking at Honour now. "I kept back the letter he gave me for you when he went away—the letters he addressed to me afterward. He knew my story! He had seen me with Gerard. I had to tell him, because I could not let him think—But Gerard did

not know that he suspected. Then I was jealous of you! I came up the night of the ball, because Gerard had not been near me; then you found my bracelet—and—and—"

"Gracieuse!" pleaded Chegary.

"Don't I tell it clearly?" she moaned. "I have ruined you both—it was to save him. Pellerin thought it all secure; but Gerard is dead, and I can tell."

"Mayne—does she mean Mayne?" Honour heard Chegary ask. She saw the Marquis bow his head.

"He was angry with me," continued Gracieuse, deaf and blind to everything passing about her. "He grew jealous of De Vieuxville—Pellerin did that too! And I could not speak a word: I could not let Gerard know I had betrayed the secret. Then he sent the challenge; but I told Monsieur if he fought I would kill myself! He was so good to me—so good—and I have ruined him and you!"

"Perhaps not, Gracieuse," the Marquis said. "When you can, you will tell us everything." He turned toward Honour, saying only,—"At least, now you begin to understand."

She stretched out her hand to him with a sudden burst of tears. He took it silently, and held it fast.

Gracieuse was speaking again.

"Then he went away. He wrote a few times—I thought he had forgiven me! Then no more letters—and all these weeks—oh, my God, these weeks! And I could neither go mad nor die! And last night the news came—dead—dead! Maybe God will let me die too, now I have told. Is it all clear?—is it—"

She broke off with a low cry, and sank back insensible. They heard her cry echoed. Gerard Mayne was in their midst; he had raised Gracieuse in his arms, exclaiming,—

"This is my wife—this is my wife!"

CHAPTER XVI.

THEIR LAST MEETING.

It was evening when Effie de Marsan reached Dieppe. The storm had risen, and the night was so tempestuous that the Newhaven boat did not come in—perhaps would not arrive, they told her, before the afternoon of the following day.

In the anxiety of waiting, a wild desire seized her to telegraph to Léon at Paris, and ask him to join her. Twice she was on the point of doing so, but her boundless obstinacy prevented her yielding to the good impulse. She told herself that she was even sorry she had left the note of explanation for him to find when he returned home; let him suffer—he deserved it.

The next morning the storm had subsided for a time; the day was bright and clear. They assured her at the hotel that the boat would certainly arrive early in the afternoon.

She grew weary of the loneliness of her

room, and went out to walk—up and down the quays, for it seemed to her that the bustle and noise would relieve her from the strange nightmare-like dread which, for the first time in her life, oppressed her.

Arthur de Chantal found her there. He had come down from Paris late the night before to join her, with a mad idea that she would go away with him. In his frenzy this was the manner in which he interpreted the letter she had thought such a masterpiece of wisdom, and believed would bring him out of the insanity which had grown so serious that it alarmed her, and effectually destroyed the impulse of coquetry which had drawn her toward him during the past months.

She saw the boy, and his haggard face and wild eyes roused a sudden terror in her mind—she who had thought herself too firm and self-reliant ever to know fear. How she wished she had yielded to the impulse to send for Léon! but it was too late now. A dismal apprehension came over her of the evil colouring which might be given to the matter if Arthur's presence in Dieppe were to become known. She felt very angry with his selfishness and imprudence, though it did not occur to her that this pursuit had been caused by anything beyond a

mad, boyish desire to see her once more alone. She did not dream that she should have any more difficulty in keeping him in order than she had hitherto found. So she mastered her annoyance—after all the romantic side of the business pleased her—and greeted him kindly enough.

"Who would have dreamed of seeing you here?" she said. "Pray what wind of chance blew you in this direction?"

"Did you not know your letter would bring me?" he cried, still holding her hands.

"Certainly not!" she answered, trying to laugh. "There—there—let go my hands! People are not expected to be demonstrative on a public pier."

"Of course I came. Oh, Effie, Effie!"

"If it had not been for the storm I should have got off last night," she continued, still trying to speak in the same tone of indifference, though her gaiety was a poor pretence. She was frightened by something in his face and manner which she had never seen there before.

"I followed you!" he cried. "I will not lose you again!"

She was horribly alarmed; she realized that this escapade would give the finish-

ing blow to her already damaged reputation.

"Then you did a very unwarrantable thing," she exclaimed, angrily.

"Don't speak to me like that!" he pleaded. "I am half mad now—"

"Arthur, Arthur!" she interrupted, for he was speaking so loudly that some persons passing turned to look after them.

"Then come where I can talk to you," he said.

She was willing enough to do this; she saw a boat at the pier; it belonged to the Lisbon packet, but would not be wanted for some time, so the sailor consented to row them out toward the steamer. Just as they were stepping in, another boat set off in the same direction laden with luggage.

At this moment, the gentleman whom Madame de Chantal afterward saw at Rouen passed along the quay. Effie remembered his face perfectly well; and though he quickly averted his head, she knew that he had recognized them both, and realized what the consequences might be.

"I shall not go," she said. "That horrid man saw us! Oh, it was a shame for you to follow me!" Why, people will say I have run off with you: it is enough to ruin me for ever."

"Then come with me!" he cried. "Why should you hesitate? It is too late for that—come!"

She laughed scornfully.

"I think you spoke too mildly when you said you were half mad," returned she; "you must have taken leave of your senses completely when you venture to speak to me like that. I desire you to go away at once. I will not talk to you! How dare you insult me in this way?"

"I love you!" he cried. "You know it—you have let me tell you so! You told me that you cared—"

"As a friend—a sister," she interrupted. "I was sorry for your infatuation. I did not want to hurt you; I thought if I was kind and patient you would overcome your folly; and this is the manner in which you repay me!"

"It is not true!" he exclaimed. "You love me: no woman would ever behave as you have done else! Oh, Effie, don't mind the world; what is the world to us? Come with me—come! See, we will take that very steamer yonder; we will go south! Oh, my darling, my love! I will make you so happy! We will forget all the misery of the past; we—"

"Had better go to the nearest madhouse,

if you insist on a journey," she broke in, with unrestrained contempt. "Arthur, you are the craziest boy I ever knew! Stop this instant, and get your senses back! Do you suppose I shall listen to such ridiculous vapouring?"

It was the first time De Chantal had ever suffered from her dreadful powers of sarcasm and scorn. She looked at him with the cold, arrogant expression which her husband knew so well—spoke with the cutting irony under which Léon had so often shuddered as under a lash.

He returned her glance with one of incredulous wonder, half believing some evil spirit had assumed the likeness of the woman he had always found so gentle and tender.

"What does this mean?" he groaned. "Effie, Effie, for God's sake do not torture me so!"

"Torture you!" she repeated, with a bitter laugh. "If I can bring you to reason by telling the truth, I shall certainly do it. I never heard of anything so crazy, so selfish, so insolent as your following me here! Were you an older man, I should think you had done it hoping that I would run off with you from sheer fright, because I feared my character would be ruined; but you are only

a boy! Oh, I will never forgive you—never!"

"Let me understand," he said, in a hoarse, broken voice. "Are you playing with me? Are you really angry because I came?"

"If I have not made my meaning sufficiently clear, your faculties must be very dull," retorted she.

"My God, Effie! can this be you speaking?" he faltered.

"How dared you come?" she cried. "What right had I ever given you to insult me so? This is my reward for showing friendship."

"Do you call our past by that name?" he asked, drearily.

The scarlet mounted to her very forehead, but shame only rendered her more angry.

"Then call it a flirtation if you will," she answered. "I can only say that I misunderstood your character, since you can outrage me."

"Flirtation?" he repeated, a stern passion thrilling into his voice. "Is that the name you give it? You have let me tell you I loved you; have let me kiss your hands; you have said you were as much alone in heart as if you had never been married; you have made me believe that you cared for me—"

"As a friend!" she broke in, turning very white.

"As a woman, who sooner or later meant to give up all for her love," he cried.

"Oh, you coward!" she exclaimed. "Because I am a woman, and cannot kill you, you dare to speak like that!"

"I don't mean to be harsh," he said, his voice sinking back into its dreary, hopeless tone; "but it is the truth! I did think you loved me, and I—I—oh, I would give my soul for you! You do not mean it; you do care for me! Effie—"

She turned away; he caught her hand.

"Let me go," she cried, "or I will call on the first *gendarme* that passes for protection! If I am to have a degrading scene forced upon me, I will find means to punish you as you deserve, whatever effect the scandal may have upon myself."

"It can't be Effie!" he moaned. "I must be mad!"

"There is no doubt of that," she said, with another cruel laugh.

"You never loved me?"

"I liked you. I thought you were my true friend; and this is the way you repay me."

"You knew I loved you—"

"It is perfectly useless to go over all that nonsense again! Say, if you like, that we had a flirtation! Nobody but a boy, an idiotic boy, would have taken *persiflage* for sober earnest."

An insane anger flamed into his face now.

"Go on," said he.

"I have done nothing, said nothing, more than every other society woman does constantly," she continued. "Why, there could be no such thing as society if all men were as silly and romantic as you! Be sensible; go away; get your senses back. I will try to forgive you."

"Try to forgive me! She will try!"

In the dismal reality of the moment romance had fled from Effie's mind. She wondered how she could ever have endured this boy: he looked so weak, so babyish. Her selfishness was roused, and she underrated him as much as she had over-estimated him while his attentions were pleasant to her.

"If that is flirtation," he said, in a slow, pitiless voice, "if it is permitted to respectable women to go in cold blood to such lengths, just to amuse themselves, then I think the lost creatures in the streets—lost through the weakness of their hearts—are purer in God's eyes

than the *grandes dames* who have not hearts to lead them astray."

It was the bitterest lesson Effie had ever received in her life. Angry as she was, for once shame mastered the emotion. For the first time she saw her conduct in something of its proper light. Try as she would, she could not get away from the conviction forced upon her.

"I am sorry I said it," he went on; "but it is true. After all, you ought to hear the truth. You call yourself pure because you will not go away with me! If I were your husband, I could respect you more if you loved a man well enough to give up all, than I could your remaining in my house, using my name as a cover for what you term flirtation, always going to the verge and never going over, held back only because you have no blood in your veins, no heart in your bosom! Why, what the world calls a lost woman is an angel of light compared to such as you. You ruin men's lives just to gratify your vanity; you hold yourselves virtuous because you only harm them. Why, the hardest-hearted painted wretch in Paris has more excuse than you! She ruins men's fortunes—it is her *métier;* you destroy their souls from sheer idleness and emptiness!"

"Arthur!"

He hurried on unheeding.

"Go? Yes, I will go! You were right to call me mad. I was! But you, who drove me so, have brought my senses back. Maybe somewhere in eternity God will pardon you, but I think my curse and your husband's will lie too heavy on your soul even for that to give you peace."

He was gone. She had grown so blind and faint, that when he went, or which way he turned, she could not have told. I think something like the unutterable self-condemnation which shall overwhelm so many of us at the Judgment withered Effie de Marsan's soul as she listened to his words.

How long she stood there, dumb, helpless, she did not know. Her husband! When thought came back it was upon him her mind fastened. He had told her over and over what her conduct meant; told her that she destroyed men's faith in women, and so degraded her sex; and he had loved her—he had—she admitted it now. He had borne so patiently and so long—she admitted that too. She stood at last face to face with her own soul, and was forced to listen to its verdict.

She remembered later that she asked a boy

who was passing to find her a *fiacre*, but at the time she did not know how she got back to the hotel. She found herself there, reached her room, and saw her cousin Gerard lying on the sofa, so worn and wasted that he looked like the shadow of his old self.

He had come in by the Newhaven boat; obliged to wait for the train, he had driven to the hotel to rest. He had seen her name in the visitors'-book, and gone to her *salon* to await her return.

He was a mere wreck from his long, terrible illness; she half mad. The cousins fell into each other's arms, and sobbed like children.

They were forced still to remain for several hours. During that waiting and their brief journey they found space and composure for explanations, and neither held anything back.

Mayne told her his full story. He had married Gracieuse Galais in England during her visit there of the previous year. It was necessary to preserve the utmost secrecy, on account of the clause in his grandfather's will, which would shut him out of the inheritance if he wedded a Roman Catholic. When he went away from Effie's house he had been angry with his wife. Pellerin's artifices had rendered him furiously jealous of De Vieuxville. He

had meant to punish her by a brief silence, but nothing more. He wandered off into Wales, and, without warning, was attacked by a terrible fever, the seeds of which had probably been sown in his system during his stay in Bavaria. He fell ill at a little inn, where he had stopped with the intention of remaining only a couple of days, and had nothing with him by which he could be identified, as his knapsack contained neither letters nor papers.

There he lay at death's door for weeks. When consciousness returned, and he could think and speak, he sent for his grandmother, and she watched over him, too much absorbed or too careless of Effie to give her any warning for a long time. The sight of his grandmother brought back Mayne's delirium, and amid its night he raved out the whole truth—able to comprehend to whom he spoke, but powerless to check the revelations had he desired; but he believed himself dying, and his only idea was to right Gracieuse.

The doctor told Mrs. Mayne that the one hope of saving his life was to make him understand that she pardoned him freely, fully; that, whatever came, his wife should be her charge.

He began at last to mend. He was able at length to make the journey to his grand-

mother's house; and there he found the letters which had accumulated in his absence. When he learned what Gracieuse had suffered, he narrowly escaped a relapse. He had known nothing of what Pellerin had forced her to do. Now, broken passages in her epistles, added to Effie's communications in regard to De Vieuxville's flight and the injury to Honour's business, helped him to understand a part.

Perhaps a week before leaving the Welsh village Mrs. Mayne wrote Effie, but the letters had by some accident been delayed.

When the cousins reached the Sainton station, Mayne went on to Monsieur Galais's house, and Effie drove home.

She was humbled enough at last; perhaps not to see her conduct in its true light, but to wish for a reconciliation—to long to find herself safe under her husband's roof.

She asked the man who opened the door if Monsieur de Marsan was at home. Madame would find Monsieur in his *atelier*, the servant said; and Effie hastened on.

Lights were burning in the rooms through which she passed, but when she opened the studio door the place was dark.

"Léon!" she called, "Léon!"

There was no answer.

"Are you here? Speak to me, Léon!"

Still no answer.

She advanced into the apartment. Coming in from the lighted rooms, she could distinguish nothing. She ran back into the antechamber, caught up a lamp, and hurried into the studio again.

She saw her husband leaning back in his easy-chair. She tried to speak his name, but could not. She went closer, closer. His eyes were wide open, seemingly fixed upon her, but Léon de Marsan was dead.

CHAPTER XVII.

JUST THE END.

When Gracieuse recovered her senses, she was lying on a sofa, her head pillowed upon her husband's breast, and he was sobbing out his penitence in her ear.

Old Mathieu had seen the direction his young mistress took, and was certain she had gone to the château; so Mayne drove on, and found himself among the startled group.

Honour only was with the young pair when Gracieuse came to herself. After a while she could comprehend that her happiness was real —Gerard living.

De Vieuxville and Jean Chegary were summoned, and Mayne told his story, which rendered Gracieuse's explanations clear.

He had never dreamed that Pellerin was influencing her; with his usual *insousiance* had put by the sugar-maker's threat, and contented himself with warning Gracieuse against the

man. Pellerin had helped him on to perfect confidence that everything was right by laughing at the idea that he could induce her to aid him in his schemes, whatever they might be; for, in his blissful ignorance of business, Mayne had slight notion.

Not only had Pellerin held over Gracieuse the threat of ruining her husband by divulging the story of the marriage,—a secret he had learned from the fact of his being in England at the time, and Mayne, then thinking him honourable and his friend, going to him for assistance, — but he had led Gracieuse to believe that the transaction into which Mayne entered to obtain money involved a forgery; so every way he held her fast.

The thirty thousand francs which Gracieuse had received from Honour's uncle she used to pay a portion of Mayne's debts—had done it without consulting him; and when he learned the truth, it was too late to change anything, even if he could have found the moral courage to do so.

Still, with all these revelations, there was no possibility of attacking Antoine Pellerin. To do so would involve public disgrace to Gracieuse. Honour would have suffered pecuniary ruin rather than allow this, and De Vieuxville

have borne all his life the imputation of being a dishonest man.

The sentiment which actuated them may seem overstrained to humanity in general, but, thank God, here and there natures do exist capable of sacrifice, even to that of yielding up life, to save another's soul alive.

Both with contracts that he had attempted to effect in Holland and those in England De Vieuxville had been made to appear a shuffler, by not answering telegrams or letters, or answering them too late.

At the worst, however, Honour would have suffered no pecuniary loss, for an unexpected inheritance which he had received from one of his mother's American relatives had enabled him to carry on his ventures at his own risk. He had never for an instant suspected Gracieuse; and when, during the later weeks of his mischances, certain things had convinced him that Pellerin was the instigator of the villainy, he had been searching for his confederate among the new clerks.

At last he had written frankly to his English broker, a man whom he could trust, the position in which he found himself, and the strangé misfortunes which met him at every turn. The broker was in Holland, and the letter was for-

warded to him there. He replied by a telegram, urging De Vieuxville to meet him without delay at Amsterdam; he hoped, from certain suspicions he entertained, that together they might be able to trace the villainy to its source. They had failed; but at least De Vieuxville managed to sell the sugars he had forwarded. He then went on with the broker to England, and there, though at a personal loss, he effected a sale of the casks lying in the bonded warehouses.

He had explained everything fully to Honour in the letter he left for her with Gracieuse. He had written several times since, and Pellerin had forced Gracieuse to reply, telling him that, though Madame Pemberton refused to hold personal communication with him, she was superintending the business, and expressed satisfaction of his conduct.

Pellerin had urged the lawyer to have De Vieuxville arrested, because he believed that, even if he could right himself in Mrs. Pemberton's eyes, the slanders would retain so strong a hold in public opinion that he must remain a marked man for life; besides this, not knowing of the money De Vieuxville had so lately inherited, he supposed the manager guilty of reckless speculation.

The next day Mademoiselle de Hauteville and Monsieur Galais returned. By this time Gracieuse was in her father's house, and her husband with her. Jean Chegary took upon himself the task of explanation, nor did he find it a difficult matter to appease the noble-hearted old man, after assuring him that Gracieuse's life might depend upon his showing her that she was freely forgiven and her husband cordially welcomed. But Mademoiselle had not gone to Havre without a purpose, and she rushed on to the château to express her belief that she had succeeded—storming like a whirlwind into the room where Honour and De Vieuxville sat.

"Here you sit!" she shouted. "You sit—you two! So that precious De Vieuxville has come back! I don't know what you are trying to do, but I know it will be a failure. Now *I have* done something! Our amiable Monsieur Antoine, I am convinced, has been falsifying his sugars, and I think we can prove it."

The old maid had, in fact, ferreted out a secret through a discharged *employé* of Pellerin's. The Rouen sugar-maker had been in the habit of practising a trick, now known to have been very common for years among the

manufacturers of France. He used to colour the sugar with some chemical in order to make it pass excise duty at a cheap rate, then extract the colouring matter, and sell the same article at a large profit.

They still had no desire to bring him into the hands of the law—no such attempt could be made without injuring Gracieuse; but Monsieur Besselère went to him and succeeded in obtaining a confession which placed him in their power.

Three months later Pellerin sold his manufactory and departed for America: Normandy had become too disagreeable an abode for him to desire to remain.

Weeks went by; Honour still lingered in her old château. The business was rapidly righting itself, and De Vieuxville's energy and the money he was able to advance would soon put Honour beyond the reach of her troubles.

The two were on the most friendly terms imaginable; but the Marquis had retreated behind his mail of pride, and, kind and gentle as he was, she could never feel that she gained an inch of the ground she had lost through suspecting him.

He asked her one day to go over to the

counting-house, as he wished to consult her upon some matter. They finished the business; there was nothing to detain Honour; but she had determined not to leave the place until she had made him comprehend how she grieved over her conduct.

"I want you to forgive me," she said, in her impulsive fashion.

"There is nothing to forgive," he replied. "I could not expect you to believe in me."

She was hurt; she turned from him, and prepared to depart in silence. He moved forward so that he could see her face; something he read there startled him for the first time with a perception of her secret.

"I love you!" he cried, suddenly. "I must go away."

"Would not that rather be a reason for staying?" she asked, trying to smile, and ending with a hearty burst of tears.

After they had talked themselves worlds aloof from the present, old Mademoiselle de Hauteville, who had taken the habit of pouncing down upon the counting-house at all hours and seasons, entered unannounced, with her customary abruptness, saw the two together and discovered the truth at a glance. She

frightened them both sorely by going into hysterics, for the only time in anybody's remembrance, from sheer delight; and when Aurora Somers learned the news she indulged in the same expression of joy with even greater energy.

Effie immured herself during some months in a convent, and wrote to Honour that she should never emerge; but before her season of mourning had expired they heard of her at Rome, and rumour declared that as soon as she could decently put off her weeds she would become the wife of a mighty Russian prince. I have no doubt that for once rumour spoke truth.

Jean Chegary went home to occupy himself with his arduous duties—to find the peace and strength any human being does find who lives for others rather than himself; but no later idol will ever usurp the place Gracieuse left vacant in his heart.

As for Arthur de Chantal, after the terrible brain-fever that followed his weeks of dissipation, during which he was watched tenderly by his mother, glad on any terms to recover her son, he wandered away into Germany. It chanced that Mathilde Flandin was there on a visit to some relatives. This time the young

couple arranged a match for themselves—and a love-match at that.

Gracieuse lost her child. When she recovered sufficiently to travel, her husband took her away to Italy for a twelvemonth, and the old father accompanied them. The youthful pair had learned a lesson they would never forget. Whatever their errors might have been, those who loved them best were not inclined to be harsh in their judgment, confident that the noble qualities which both possessed would develope fully under the effects of that bitter experience and this present happiness.

Some of the best of De Marsan's pictures hang in the château at Vieuxville. The unfinished painting is there too, but it is never shown to strangers; and Léon, "after life's fitful fever, sleeps well."

THE END.

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